

MICRO-FOUNDATIONS FOR THE SCIENCE(S) OF POLITICS

Philippe C. Schmitter
Professor emeritus
European University Institute

Every science – whether physical or human – rests on its micro-foundations. These are the basic assumptions shared by its practitioners that shape the way in which they identify topics and transform them into projects worthy of research. Normally, they are invisible – as befits most foundations – and are often accepted implicitly and without controversy. However, the visible structures of science – the concepts, hypotheses, methods, data, associations and inferences – are only as valid as are these foundations. And when these above-ground products are faced with explaining empirical anomalies or unintended outcomes, then, it may become necessary to dig up those micro-foundations and re-examine them.

Political science (or political sciences, as I shall argue) is no exception. **Power** – or its many cognates such as influence, pressure, distortion, manipulation, coercion, conflict, threat, collusion, hegemony or antagonism – provides the substance around which its visible structure is built. And power serves to justify its generic claim to possessing distinctive micro-foundations as an academic discipline. Whether it is wielded legitimately or illegitimately, legally or illegally, overtly or covertly, publicly or

privately, benignly or malignly, political science is supposed to explain how it is exercised and what are its effects.

Following the venerable advice of Aristotle, "It is the mark of an educated man to look for precision in each class of things (read: **science** or **academic discipline**) just so far as the nature of the subject admits."¹ Therefore, the practitioners of this science should be resting their research on a set of assumptions that are as "precise" as their subject matter is distinctive. Modern political science, especially as practiced in the United States, has passed repeatedly through periods in which efforts were made to fill its micro-foundations with assumptions drawn from other human sciences: law, social psychology, functionalist anthropology and, most recently and aggressively, neo-liberal economics. This has threatened to deprive it of the distinctive "precision" of its "class of things," namely, the exercise of power and the consequences thereof. None of these intrusions has been completely successful, but each has left some subterranean residues.

For several decades now, the practices of politics seem to have outrun the theories of politics. Unexpected events have occurred – e.g. the collapse of communism; trends have emerged that are difficult to explain with the usual variables – e.g. the almost

¹ Nicomachaen Ethics, Book 1, Chapter 3, 2-3.,

universal decline in voter turnout and party membership in “real-existing democracies”; others that were supposed to have happened – remember “The End of History”? – did not; major regime changes took place in settings that supposedly lacked all of the prerequisites for such occurrences -- just try to imagine the persistence of something like liberal democracy in Albania and Mongolia with the paradigms of the 1960s and 1970s.

So, it may be time to excavate and re-examine the micro-foundations of the political sciences.² For there are, at least, two quite different “classes of things” that students of politics have historically tried to explain. Machiavelli expressed this quite clearly and dramatically when he complained about being born in “female times” and, therefore, having to create a new science of politics to explain this misfortune.³ This was a context in which there were either no rules or no one who would reliably obey the rules. Anticipating Hobbes, this notoriously misogynist Florentine attempted to pass on suggestions to rulers in situations in which political life was “solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short” and in which their overriding task was to create a “stato” -- rather than to operate within one. In “male times” Machiavelli implied, politics

² The French have long used the expression “les sciences politiques,” but as far as I can tell this has nothing to do with the epistemological distinction I am making here.

³ The Prince

takes place within and between institutions that circumscribe the options of actors and make their behaviours more predictable.

Until recently, this line of demarcation ` was supposed to run between international relations and domestic politics, and this was used to justify their separate status as sub-disciplines of political science. The former was "female" and, hence, potentially anarchic with no higher authority or predictably binding rules above its (allegedly) unitary and sovereign actors – the national states -- that were expected to do whatever was necessary to further their particular interests and to defend themselves from the predation of others. The latter was "male" and took place within a political space pre-defined by formal and informal (if not always constitutional) norms, ordered by a supreme (and sometimes legitimate) authority over a specific territory, and even one that possessed a distinctive common identity.

This distinction within the discipline is no longer valid. International (or, better, interstate) relations have become clogged with a myriad of conventions, treaties, "regimes," intergovernmental organizations and even (especially in the case of Europe) regional supra-national polities and courts. Sovereignty has become more and more of a formality; nationality is less and less exclusive. Meanwhile, the number of putatively sovereign and national states has proliferated

and many of them have little or none of the “male” qualities described above. The list of outright “failed states” is getting longer and there is a growing waiting list of “defective ones.” Sometime (I suspect in the 1970s or 1980s), the line was crossed and it became statistically more likely that the resident of a given country would be killed in a civil war among his or her co-nationals than in an international war by foreigners.

The fact that the empirical loci of “female” and “male” politics has shifted does not invalidate the difference in terms of micro-foundations. Both are still very much present in our world and they definitely still require contrasting, nor to say antithetic, sets of basic assumptions. In what follows, I will confine myself to exploring what Machiavelli called the “male” side of the discipline.⁴ While there is bound to be some overlap between the two research agendas, I am going to presume that the visible above-ground topics to be explained or understood are surrounded by pre-existing norms and institutions that are known to the actors and whose effect is more or less predictable. This does not preclude a lot of misunderstanding about what limits they impose and of

⁴ Terry Karl, my wife, has objected to this and suggested that I invert Machiavelli’s nomenclature on the grounds that women who study politics are notoriously reluctant to accept the assumptions of his “female” science. I concede the point but have resisted out of respect for the original source. However, in order to neuter the discussion somewhat, I have converted the terms to “M-politics” meaning “most political situations” studied by contemporary political scientists and to “F-politics” meaning “few political situations” likely to be of interest to them.

opportunistic behaviour designed to probe their efficacy, and it does not resume that all of these constraints are formal (much less constitutional), but they can be taken as prior “givens” both by researchers and practitioners of M-politics.

What are the elements of a secure and well-balanced micro-foundation for any discipline in the human/social sciences? And what, then, should be distinctive about an M-science of politics? These should be *a priori* assumptions that are more or less isomorphic with the situations involving power that are usually faced by politicians and justifiable according to the norms of the publics involved. Basing one’s science upon conditions that do not exist or values that cannot be satisfied may be useful for constructing formal models or exhorting people to change their behaviour, but both are, at best, of marginal utility as foundations for building the sort of empirical science of M-politics I have in mind.

I will explore five of these elements that I am convinced are necessary for supporting a science of M-politics: agents, motives, mechanisms, regimes and units, and one that is no longer so relevant for most practitioners of the science: *telos*.

1. **Agents:** This is the most distinctive feature of a human as opposed to a natural or physical science. It begins with

the assumption that the objects of research are also its subjects. In the case of politics, this means that agents can make choices that are not completely determined by the conditions in which they find themselves and, hence, introduces much more significant sources of innovation and unpredictability or, as Machiavelli called them, *virtù e fortuna*. It also implies that the subjects have the capacity for reflexivity. They are historical in the sense that their present actions are influenced by reflections (“memories”) from the past. Moreover, the very process of researching their power relations – past or present – can produce changes in the behaviour or expectations of the agents one is studying.

The vast majority of political science researchers presume that these agents are **individual and independent human beings** faced with and capable of making choices between alternative and consequential actions. Not only are they uniquely capable of exerting such political agency, but they are often also assumed to have other relevant qualities, for example, to have pre-established and relatively fixed preferences, to be able to rank these preferences consistently and to assign to them a specific intensity, to have adequate information about alternative courses of action and theories

about their effects, to choose predictably the one that (they think) best realizes those preferences, and to still have these same preferences once the consequences of their choice are experienced. Even with the insertion of caveats referring to such aspects as "bounded rationality," "limited or asymmetric information," "intransitive preferences," "transaction costs," and "logics of appropriateness or habit," this generic conception of the role of agents accords not only with currently fashionable theories of rational choice, but reflects the much deeper ideological commitment of modern social and political thought to liberal individualism and rational progress. Shifting to a different micro-foundation will seem to many to be equivalent to declaring that M-politics is an activity rooted in raw emotion, blind faith, mindless imitation, instinctual tradition, collective stupidity and/or random events - and, hence, incapable of collectively improving the world that we live it.

I have two reasons for calling this time-worn foundation into question. The first has to do with the sheer complexity and contingency that surrounds the contemporary individual. He or she cannot possibly know what are the 'real' alternatives and, even less, what all of their eventual consequences will be. Moreover, this individual is very likely to discover upon

reflection that he or she has many conflicting interests or passions – especially over different time horizons – and, hence, cannot order them consistently according to rank and intensity. And, if those reasons were not enough, he or she is typically acting within a multi-layered and poly-centric “nested” set of institutions capable of making binding collective decisions – some public and some private. Agent preferences become contingent on which policies are proposed and by whom, and probably will change during the course of political exchange between the various layers and centers.

My second reason for resetting micro-foundations is even more subversive to the prevailing orthodoxy. What if most of the significant actors engaged in M-politics were permanent organizations, not individual persons?⁵ Granted that these organizations are composed of individuals and some of them may depend very closely on the contributions and allegiance of these persons – but many do not and have developed elaborate rules and sources of support that cannot be reduced to such individual actions. They embody collective choices made long ago and have acquired a reputation and legitimacy

⁵ We owe the initial discovery of this to a Scandinavian, Gunnar Hecksher, when he debated the consequences for the polity of its becoming “genom organiserat,” and from another Scandinavian, Johan P. Olsen, came its first incorporation into the title of a full-length book on Organized Democracy. However, I am convinced that this transformation is not limited to this part of the world. – just a bit earlier and more extreme there.

of their own. They are not just the arithmetic sum of independent and individual preferences, but these political parties, interest associations, social movements, non-governmental organizations, business firms, government agencies and private foundations are often in the business of teaching these persons what their preferences should be and committing them to obeying to policies made in their name.

M-politics whether in an autocracy or a democracy is all about representation – about collective bodies acting in lieu of individual persons. In the former case, the number of those involved is smaller and the criteria for their selection are more restrictive, but organizations are still likely to be the key actors. In the latter, freedom of association and petition – coupled with the diffusion of organizational skills from the private to the public realm – has made it almost mandatory for individuals to resort to them if they are to have any impact upon rulers or their policies.

And organizations have transformed the nature of politics. By definition, they have solved the problem of rational collective action by individuals and, in some cases, they may even have addressed some of the issues involved in the inequality of power resources by combining large numbers to countervail

the concentrated influence of privileged groups. Their preferences do not have to be inferred or indirectly revealed, they are articulated publicly in their normal activity. Granted there are bound to be some elements of dissimulation, strategic action and hypocrisy in these activities, but these are minor compared to those of less well-informed and publicly committed individuals. They are also capable (if they chose) of extending the time horizon for political calculations because they usually outlive their members (and sometimes even the social category they claim to represent). They tend to develop standard operating procedures and official ideologies that greatly facilitate the calculation of preferences and intensities and they collectivize them making it much easier for authorities to consult and negotiate with them.

2. **Motives:** Again, M-political science has its orthodox response: **self-interest** (sometimes tempered by the caveat, "rightly understood"). The individual political agent can invariably be relied upon to choose that alternative that best satisfies his or her own and highest ranked preference at the lowest cost. Albert Hirschmann has brilliantly traced the historical evolution of this notion from ancient times when it was regarded as one of the worst of political vices (i.e. greed) to the present when it has

become an omni-present and (allegedly) benevolent virtue.⁶ Moreover, the fact that this transformation was closely associated with the emergence and dominance of capitalism has encouraged the wholesale and uncritical importation of the rhetoric and logic of market competition into the analysis of M-politics.

The most obvious objection to this micro-foundation, stressed by Hirschmann, is that human beings also have **passions**, and these have not been completely eliminated by capitalism. They still can care about others, even about the whole society or political unit in which they live. Without belonging to some sort of meaningful collective identity, they would find it impossible to identify or act upon their individual interests since most political actions affect not just a person but a social, economic or cultural group. And, in order to belong to that group and especially to convince others to act collectively, individuals have to appear “reasonable,” i.e., to be capable of justifying their preferences, and they have to behave in an “appropriate” fashion, i.e., to conform to pre-established collective norms. In an M-type polity these identities and norms are likely to be highly routinized and codified, but they nonetheless are rooted in passions for expressing oneself, for

⁶ AOH, Passions and Interests

belonging and for being admired that severely limit the pursuit of self-interest.

Even if the political analyst insists on retaining the individual as his or her basic foundation, it would seem imperative to recognize explicitly the “mixed motives” of this agent. The ‘rightly understood’ caveat implies internalized recognition of the norms and identities of others, and not just taking into strategic consideration the interests of these others or the likelihood of being punished by laws of the unit as a whole. And that may even lead the analyst to acknowledging a role for “the public interest” as a factor in resolving the inevitably conflicting motives behind the exercise of power to make binding decisions upon the polity as a whole.

If one abandons the individualistic assumption and switches to organizations, then, the task is greatly facilitated. By their very nature, these more or less permanent organizations are collectivities with internal processes for dealing with the diverse motives of their members and followers – and coming up with an expression of interests and/or passions that is publicly justifiable and normatively appropriate. Granted, again, that there is plenty of room for dissimulation, strategic action and outright hypocrisy on the part of these

organizations, but revealing them will be facilitated by the more abundant and public nature of the information they provide.

3. **Mechanisms:** The mantra of the discipline is **competition**.

Agents exercise their relative power by competing with each other in order to satisfy their respective interests or passions. In the case of M-politics, this presumes the existence of a pre-existing institutional context in which conflicting motives are channelled by mutually respected rules into a process that limits the use of power resources and the range of possible outcomes. Otherwise, the agents would engage in unruly **conflict** not bound by such constraints and would exercise their power by threatening or exercising violence to impose their interests or passions, i.e., they would find themselves in a situation of F-politics.

This seems both a reasonable and realistic assumption and there are certainly many cases of polities in which the use of power has been domesticated in this fashion to the mutual benefit of the agents involved. The distortion within the discipline comes when political scientists reduce its application to the process of electoral competition. The fact that political parties compete with each other for the representation of

territorial constituencies and the right to form governments – even when these elections are freely and fairly conducted, and their outcomes uncertain – does not exhaust the mechanisms whereby political agents compete with each other over “the authoritative allocation of values.” Not surprisingly, these other mechanisms are populated less with individuals than with organizations: competition between interest associations to influence public policy; prosecution of politicians for violating legal norms by law firms or public interest groups; demonstrations by social movements to set the public agenda or to block the implementation of policies; revelations by rival media firms to discredit or support the reputation of rulers. All of these are important (and often highly institutionalized) features of M-politics that deserve at least as much attention as the more sporadic and routine conduct of electoral competition.⁷

Another mechanism also deserves a more prominent place in the micro-foundations of M-politics, namely, **cooperation**. If competition is not to degenerate into conflict, political agents have first to cooperate by agreeing upon the rules – formal or

⁷ It has been argued that these mechanisms can be ignored because they are parasitic upon the electoral mechanism. If the latter are conducted properly, the former will function well. Adam Przeworski ... as a basis for his minimalist conception of democracy. I submit that the most elementary empirical examination of M-politics would reveal a great deal of divergence in the performance of these other mechanisms of competition. It is one thing to state that holding ‘proper’ elections is a necessary condition for sustaining a particular type of regime, i.e., liberal democracy, quite another to claim that this is a sufficient condition for all of these mechanisms to function well.

informal – that limit and channel their use of power. Many of these are habits or strictures inherited from previous generations (*vide* “path dependence”), but they are continuously subject to challenges as relations of power and identity of agents change and therefore require re-affirmation by contemporary agents. Moreover, these agents also cooperate in order to ally with each other, both to modify the pre-existing rules of engagement and to affect present policy outcomes. While it is understandable that political science should privilege competition – if only because its presence is much more visible and consequential – cooperation deserves more status and attention that it usually receives.

And, so does its perverse form, **collusion**, i.e., when agents act in agreement to prevent outsiders from competing through whichever of the usual mechanisms. Taken to the extreme, resort to this kind of collective behaviour by insiders would involve shifting from M- to F-politics.

4. **Regimes**: Students of M-politics typically assume that the polity they are analyzing has a relatively stable configuration of institutions that are complementary to each other. The behaviours of its agents, motives and mechanisms are somehow – functionally, ideationally, intentionally or

constitutionally – related to each other at a higher foundational level, such that their nature or importance cannot just be assessed alone and uniformly. They are embedded in an institutionalized whole that conditions what role it is that individuals or organizations, self-interests or other-regarding ones, competition or cooperation can play.

Normally, these regimes are given a label and it is presumed that those in the same generic category will share many foundational elements. At one time, there were three such labels: **democratic**, **totalitarian** and **authoritarian** or, as I prefer, **autocratic**. More recently, the middle one has dropped out and been replaced with “**hybrid**” or some other diminutive version of democracy. Needless to say, each of these can be broken down further by the analyst into sub-types when he or she explores the performance of more specific agents, motives or mechanisms.

The implications of this intrusion of “regimes” into the micro-foundations of the discipline are considerable – if still debatable. For one thing, the recognition of such diversity means giving up the quest for universalistic “covering laws” that can be applied to any agent, motive or mechanism. Individuals or organizations do not behave the same in

democracies and autocracies; the 'reasonableness' and 'appropriateness' of interests or passions depends on the institutions to which they are addressed; mechanisms such as competitive elections or cooperative multi-party alliances can take on different meanings depending on their complimentary relationship with other mechanisms of competition/conflict or cooperation/collusion. It also may be reflected in the quite noticeable decline in references to "national" or "regional" peculiarities in explaining political behaviour. Adjectives such as "Asian," "Latin American," "African," "Bolivian" or "Albanian" stuck in front of substantives such as democracy or political culture tend now to have only a descriptive and not an analytic importance. What counts are less geo-cultural specificities than generic institutional configurations wherever they are located.

5. **Units:** Ever since Aristotle collected the constitutions of 158 Greek city-polities, the privileged unit in political science for both observation and analysis was supposed to have a relatively autonomous economy, a self-governing polity and a distinctive collective identity – all coinciding with each other in a given territory. Eventually, thanks to European domestic politics and overseas empires, this unit became the **sovereign national state**. It is usually

presumed that only within this type of unit are agents capable of making choices and implementing them effectively, do most individuals or organizations calculate their interests and passions, can most political mechanisms really operate and will regimes work out their stable institutional complementarities.

Nothing is more firmly rooted in the micro-foundations of M-political science than this assumption.⁸ Virtually every existing statement about politics should be prefaced with the following phrase: "Take an existing national state and, only then, will ...(X be related to Y)."⁹ But what if this can no longer be relied upon? What if that presumed coincidence between autonomy, capacity and identity has been disrupted beyond repair? What units, then, can provide the necessary micro-foundations for observing and comparing M-political behaviour.

In the contemporary world, no political unit can realistically connect cause and effect and produce intended results

⁸ It was precisely the absence of such a unit that distinguished the "female times" of Machiavelli and formerly characterized the anarchic universe of international relations. Even in the latter case, however, most analysts presumed the existence of a number of such self-contained and self-referential unitary polities capable of acting in a sovereign manner to defend their national interests.

⁹ Only rarely do M-political scientists bother to ask **why** a given sovereign state exists. This is simply taken as a given upon which to build a structure of explanation. And comparative analyses presume that all of the units included are of an identical or similar nature. Explaining how these units got that way is presumably a job left to national historians who, of course, give detailed and idiosyncratic descriptions of the process of state formation.

without regard for the actions of others. Virtually all polities have persons and organizations within their borders that have identities, loyalties and interests that overlap with persons and organizations in other polities. Nor can one be assured that polities with the same formal political status or level of aggregation will have the same capacity for agency. Depending on their insertion into multi-layered systems of production, distribution and governance, their capacity to act or react independently to any specific opportunity or challenge can vary enormously. This is most obviously the case for those national states that have entered into supra-national arrangements such as the European Union or signed binding international treaties such as those of the IMF or the WTO. Not only do they occasionally find themselves publicly shamed or found guilty by such organizations, but they regularly anticipate such constraints and alter their behavior accordingly. Moreover, many contemporary national polities have granted or been forced to concede extensive powers to their sub-national units and, in some cases, these *provinces, cantons, regioni, estados autónomicos* or *departments* have entered into cooperative arrangements with equivalent units in other national states. From these observations, I conclude that M-political scientists need to

dedicate much more thought to the units they choose and the properties these units supposedly share with regard to the specific agent, motive, mechanism or regime that is being examined. There still remains a great deal of variation that can only be explained by conditions prevailing at the internal (national) level, but exercising or ignoring the increasingly complex external context in which these units are embedded introduces a serious analytical distortion.

The practice of political science does follow and should imitate changes in "real-existing politics" – but always with a considerable delay. The most important set of generic changes that have occurred in recent decades involves the spread of "complex interdependence" and many of the anomalies and unexpected outcomes can be traced to them. There is absolutely nothing new about the fact that formally independent polities have extensive relations with each other. That used to be justified in the micro-foundations of F-politics. What is novel is not only the sheer magnitude and diversity of these exchanges, but also the extent to which they penetrate into virtually all social, economic and cultural groups and into almost all geographic areas within these polities. Previously, they

were mainly concentrated among restricted elites living in a few favored cities or regions. Now, it takes an extraordinary political effort to prevent the population anywhere within national borders from becoming “contaminated” by the flow of foreign ideas and enticements. “Globalization” has become the catch-all term for these developments, even if it tends to exaggerate the evenness of their spread and scope across the planet.

Its impact upon specific agents, motives, mechanisms and regimes is highly contentious, but two (admittedly hypothetical) trends would seem to have special relevance for the conduct of M-political science:

(1) Globalization narrows the potential range of policy responses, undermines the capacity of (no-longer) sovereign national states to respond autonomously to the demands of their citizenry and, thereby, weakens the legitimacy of traditional political intermediaries and state authorities;

2) Globalization widens the resources available to non-state actors acting across national borders and shifts policy responsibility upward to trans-national quasi-state actors – both of which undermine formal institutions and informal arrangements at the national level, and promote the diffusion of new trans-national norms of political behavior.

If either of these is true and especially if both are, then, a major shift” in micro-foundations should occur – and M-political scientists will have to give serious thought to

whether the sovereign national state should remain their exclusive or even privileged unit of observation and analysis.

The most difficult challenge will come from abandoning the presumption of "stateness." Sovereignty has long been an abstract concept that "everyone knew" was only a convenient fiction, just as they also "knew" that almost all states had social groups within them that did not share the same common political identity. One could pretend that the units were independent of each other in choosing their organizations and regimes and one could get away with assuming that something called "the national interest" existed and, when invoked, did have an impact upon such collective choices. But the notion of stateness impregnates the furthest corners of the vocabulary used to discuss politics – especially stable, iterative M-politics. It seems self-evident to us that this particular form of organizing political life will continue to dominate all others, spend most publicly generated funds, authoritatively allocate most resources, enjoy a unique source of legitimacy and furnish most people with a distinctive identity. However we may recognize that the sovereign national state is under assault from a variety of directions – beneath and

beyond its borders – its “considerable resilience” has been repeatedly asserted. To expunge it (or even to qualify it significantly) would mean, literally, starting all over and creating a whole new language for talking about and analyzing politics. The assiduous reader will have noted that I have already tried to do this by frequently referring to “polity” in this talk when the normal phrase would have been “state” or “nation”.

6. Telos: Here I shall be brief since very few practicing M-political scientists would now include this among their micro-foundations. It used to be assumed that politics was headed in a predictable direction – that the entire sub-structure was moving somewhere over time, however erratically and unevenly across different units. The Will of God, the power of human rationality, the natural selection of historical evolution, or the greater appeal of liberal democracy have been at various times candidates for explaining why better values and institutions would eventually win out. Francis Fukuyama’s re-furbishing of Hegel’s dialectic of rationality briefly revived such thinking, but the “End of History” proved ephemeral. Even the most enthusiastic students of democratization (and I include

myself among them) would argue that these recent regime changes are definitive or even deny that well-entrenched “real-existing” democracies might not be in deep trouble.

Conclusion

Aristotle famously argued that political science was the “master science” since all of the other human sciences depended upon the results produced by politics. Ironically, this assertion of superiority is also a source of weakness when it comes to assessing its micro-foundations. Political science is bound to be an “open science.” It not only reaches into and affects crucial aspects of other realms of human behaviour, but it is also bound to be penetrated by assumptions and concepts coming from them. Law, sociology, psychology and, especially economics have all claimed to be closed and, therefore, self-referential sciences and each of them has attempted to penetrate the very micro-foundations of political science. At times, this has threatened to deprive the discipline of its distinctive focus on the use of power and its conversion (sometimes) into legitimate authority to resolve conflicts and achieve collective purposes.

All of the micro-foundations of M-political science need to be dug up and critically re-examined. The above-ground edifices that they are

supposed to be supporting have changed significantly and I suspect that one of the reasons political scientists are less capable of explaining these structures and behaviours is because they often are starting with the wrong basic assumptions about agents, motives, mechanisms, regimes and units. Worse, they have periodically allowed themselves to be undermined by the practitioners of other social sciences that may have greater professional prestige,¹⁰ but no comprehension of the distinctive “precision” of the “class of things” that is politics. However, if the past still has any validity, each time it has been invaded the discipline has eventually recuperated its political precision (or, better, its understanding of political imprecision) and even extracted some things of value from those who invaded it.

The sciences of politics – both of them – have to adapt to the increased complexity and contingency of their subject matter. Power and its cognates are being wielded in new settings and under different constraints. My hunch is that awareness of this will lead to a loosening and diversifying of each of these five micro-foundational elements – and to greater sensitivity to their interactions. Agents can be individuals or organizations ... depending. Motives can be

¹⁰ One shall see if the recent precipitous decline in the prestige of neo-liberal economics will suffice to break the hold of its acolytes, especially, on American political science – or whether its penetration of micro-foundations has been so profound that it will continue to support research and publication based on its assumptions. The fact that the careers of so many professional political scientists in the United States (and a few in Europe) have become dependent on such a survival suggests that the latter outcome will prevail.

based on narrow, immediate self-regarding interests or broad, future and collective-regarding passions ... depending. Mechanisms of competition and cooperation can involve elected representatives or self-selected ones ... depending. Regimes can be classified as democratic or autocratic ... and they can change, even permute into each other. Finally, units can be simultaneously relevant at different levels of identity and aggregation ... and so can the agents, motives, mechanisms and regimes within them.

What is needed for advancing such a radically pluralistic M-science of politics is not the testing of single hypotheses or models, but the generation of hypotheses and models rooted in different micro-foundational assumptions and the systematic comparison of the different results they predict (or retrodict) -- probably, by using different sets of data and methods of association. If this sounds messy and inconclusive, so is "the class of things" that political scientists are condemned to deal with.