

Review of *QUANTUM POLITICS, APPLYING QUANTUM THEORY TO POLITICAL PHENOMENA*, edited by Theodore L. Becker (New York; Westport, Connecticut; London: Praeger, 1991) 232 pages, plus 16 page preface [price not available]

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Every once in a while, I discover someone has written a book that I wanted to write. Walter Truett Anderson's *TO GOVERN EVOLUTION* was certainly one such (and his *REALITY ISN'T WHAT IT USED TO BE* was a close second). But *QUANTUM POLITICS* is definitely a book I wish I had written (or at least edited), and am overjoyed that Ted Becker has actually done so. I am confident that this volume will mark a turning point in political theory, political design, and eventually political practice. It definitely should be on the assigned reading list of every student of politics, and every political activist. I don't expect many current politicians to read it, although they certain should, but I do expect it to be a kind of Bible for future political generations.

I must be ever clearer at the outset that I am by no means a neutral observer in all of this. Three of the nine authors in this book were colleagues of mine in the Department of Political Science of the University of Hawaii (Ted Becker, Christa Slaton, and Rudy Rummel). We were, in fact, along with Glen Schubert and several graduate students, participants in an informal "quantum politics group" which met in the mid 1980s and which even reported our work on a panel of the American Political Science Association meeting in Chicago, Illinois, in 1987. Moreover, Prof. Schubert and myself were invited by Prof. Becker to contribute to this volume. But I felt that I unfortunately had nothing more to say beyond what I had already published in the proceedings of a workshop sponsored by the Gottlieb Duttweiler Institute in 1983.

But the nine authors which Becker has convened have a great deal useful to say, although there is in many ways as much diversity among them about what quantum politics is, or might become, as one might imagine. In his opening essay, Becker appropriates a phrase from physics itself and calls each chapter a "thought experiment". He also lists some of the new political insights which he finds in each of them. For example:

"Quantum politics must be based on the unpredictable, contradictory nature of human beings."

"Marxism is the most ambitious child of Newtonian Europe."

"True democracies are self-organizing systems."

"Models of politics must allow chance to play a major part."

"A post-Newtonian [US] Supreme Court would overcome a judicial blindness that legitimizes serious governmental injury to the most vulnerable citizens."

(All quotes on page xv)

And many more.

In order in the book, the "thought experiments" are these:

After the forward by Becker, the volume opens with a presidential address to the American Political Science Association delivered by William Bennett Munro in 1927 titled, "Physics and Politics--an Old Analogy Revised." Munro himself opened his statement by referring to a book written by Walter Bagehot fifty-five years earlier called "Physics and Politics." Thus we are immediately reminded that this is not a new idea, only a neglected one. Other political scientists who have written about the relation of theories in physics to political design include Martin Landau, in 1961, and James Robinson who published an article "Newtonianism and the Constitution" in 1957. Until Glen Schubert brought it back up in 1971, and again in 1983, this was a perspective mostly ignored by mainstream political science.

Note the title of Robinson's article. It indicates one of the central points in the quantum politics perspective: the constitutions of all nations today, beginning with the US Constitution of 1789, derive from a Newtonian worldview dominant in the 18th Century. This world view is rationalistic, mechanistic, posits immediate cause-and-effect, predictive, and assumes an objective real world which can be objectively observed and measured by a trained, neutral observer.

This view is further incorporated into the law and legal systems of all nations which assume that humans are rational actors deterred, or encouraged, to obey or defy of the law on the basis of a careful, self-interested calculus by which they compare the advantages in breaking or upholding the law to the penalties and punishments for breaking or upholding it each time one acts. Moreover, everyone is supposed to be fully informed. "Ignorance of the law is no excuse," so that everyone clearly knows what the law is before breaking or abiding by it. Similar assumptions underlie all modern political systems, and most theories, concerning voting and other political activities (not to mention most modern economic theories).

But most social and behavioral science theories developed since Newton say that these assumptions are not the basis for understanding actual human behavior. Darwin and Freud, to name two intellectual giants of the 19th Century, have quite different paradigms which suggest how marginal indeed rationality, predictability, and objectivity are in human decisionmaking. But in the early 20th Century, quantum physics seemed to go even farther.

Some physicists suggest that there is no real world, or at least no one real world (there may be many--perhaps an infinite number). Moreover, even if an objective real world exists, it is impossible for a human to say anything certain about it (at least at the micro level), because every act of observation and every attempt at measurement disturbs the "thing" being observed. Thus humans participate with the universe, and do not just act in it, or observe its independent operation.

There are no immutable natural laws to be discovered. Everything that seems lawful is at best probabilistic, and perhaps fundamentally random. Anything that seems to be immutable is merely a consequence of the "law" of large numbers and/or the limited time horizon of humans. Nothing can be predicted with certainty (therefore no "science of the future" which presumes to be able to predict the future is possible).

Another important perspective is simultaneity--the validity, or at least utility, of contradictory statements of the behavior of a phenomenon. Moreover, "everything is connected to everything else," so "action at a distance"--rather than only localized cause-effect--also exists. Yet, this is not to say that we simply live in a larger system than we imagined. "System theory" of this mechanistic sort is wrong. In its place we have "field theory" where the interaction of quanta themselves, rather than the operation of discrete units in a system, is primary.

Ted Becker, Christa Slaton, and Gus diZerega, each in separate chapters, develop these and other (sometimes competing) notions of quantum physics and quantum politics in contrast to various mainstream political theories based on the obsolete (or at least limited) Newtonian physics. DiZerega also relates them to the ideas of post-modernity, ecology, and Eastern mysticism, and derives a theoretical basis for a Green politics.

Both R. J. Rummel and Peggy Ann James take a substantially different approach. Rummel, whose undergraduate training was as a physicist, invented a field theory, along with an improved form of factor analysis, for a series of highly regarded studies of the causes of international conflict

during the 1960s, 70s, and 80s. He tends to distance himself from the more intuitive, metaphorical, and mystical interpretations of quantum, and attempts to ground his perspective in a sophisticated positivistic and mathematical base. Many physicists do the same.

Similarly, Peggy Ann James is interested in the use of a quantum perspective for the modeling of entropy in systems. Her principal point is that "political stability can be more fruitfully considered as a system dynamic ran as a static descriptor." "Change," she says, "is not a hostile agent to the system." [Both quotes on p. 142]

Probably the chapter closest to being a true "thought experiment"--and certainly the cleverest chapter in the book--is by E. Sam Overman. Though dryly titled "Policy Physics," it is cast as a fictional discussion between the seminal quantum physicist, Niels Bohr, and the equally seminal political scientist, Harold Lasswell (who can be credited for instigating almost everything new in political science before and after the Second World War, including an idea of policy sciences which is very compatible with a quantum perspective). Auguste Comte, who of course must be viewed as the granddaddy of the entire social physics perspective, also gets some positivistic licks in at the end of this imaginary conversation.

However, the article that will have everyone talking is by Laurence Tribe, the distinguished professor of law at Harvard Law School. Indeed the article originally appeared in the Harvard Law Review in 1989 . Subtitled, "What lawyers can learn from modern physics," it is the first attempt I am aware of to apply quantum physics to law--primarily constitutional law--in the US. While the article is a great tour de force, the chances of it being taken seriously the US Supreme Court within the next quarter century or more are very slim, given the recent appointments to that Court by Presidents Reagan and Bush, all of whom are at best Newtonians--and probably Ptolemaists instead.

John Heilman then concludes the volume with a piece which attempts to state what the quantum perspective has to say about "the methodology of political research." While useful in its own right, it does not add much to the overall discussion.

I said at the outset that this volume is required reading. I must add that it is easy reading too, especially given the importance and novelty of the message. It is clear that Becker, who is one of the few lucid writers in the American political science profession, exercised a helpful editorial hand, and thus added substantially to the utility of the volume. Where the

writing is obtuse, it is my bet that the author resisted Becker's suggestions for change.

I also said at the outset that I am no neutral observer of this book. But big deal! While I've tried to be fair, from a quantum perspective who can observe anything neutrally?