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In the Preface to his *Game Theory and Political Theory* (1986), Peter Ordeshook writes, “Of necessity, we use mathematics...the days are gone in which political scientists can study their craft while relaxing in a comfortable easy chair. Like our colleagues in science, engineering, and economics, we must now study political theory and the cutting edge of our discipline while sitting at a desk” (x, italics added).

In *Japan and the Enemies of Open Political Science*, David Williams employs a similar metaphor to contrary ends: “Empirical neglect and linguistic ignorance are old positivist failings. In the name of universal science, Comte and other armchair positivists devised laws of human development...at the expense of empirical field work” (25, italics added). Will the real armchair academics please sit down?

This essay will review Williams’ eloquent critique of the “pernicious” (59) and “Procrustean” (51) influence positivism is having on political science, and his call for “a post-positivist social science” (90). The postwar Japanese miracle is Williams’s point of departure. Asserting postwar Japan to be a “canonic polity...important enough, in world-historical terms, to demand comparison with Plato’s Athens, Machiavelli’s Florence or John Rawls’ America” (98), Williams laments the failure of positivists and post-structuralists alike to recognize Japanese—or any non-European—achievement. As “world-historical” suggests, Williams sees himself as a follower of Hegel. In his 1994 study *Japan: Beyond the End of History*, Williams puts forward the Japanese case to refute Francis Fukuyama. He continues the project in *Japan and the Enemies* with a terse quote from Takeuchi Yoshihiko: “Japan is nothing” (229). This, Williams argues, is the first possible way to reconcile Japan and Hegel: equate World History with European history and relegate the non-European to epiphenomenon (recall Hegel: “Africa has no history”). The second method, that of the post-structuralists, is to cure the disease of Eurocentrism by denying History and marginalizing every pursuit. Williams scolds Edward Said and his “acolytes” (152) in Subaltern Studies for overreacting: a science of the Orient is possible. The third possibility, the one Williams champions, is for the non-European world to follow Japan’s example and learn “to make History” (242). Franz Fanon and V. S. Naipaul are two of Williams’s heroes, for their accomplishments prove that “history’s victims, unlike the poor, need not always be with us” (40).

Williams reserves his sharpest criticism, however, for the “monist dogmatism” (261) spawned by positivism. Alt and Shepsle’s *Perspectives on Positive Political Economy* is lambasted for flaunting scientific hubris but failing to develop a persuasive ontology for positivism. (Williams has not yet gotten his hands on the new methodological bible, King, Keohane, and Verba’s *Designing Social Inquiry: Scientific Inference in Qualitative Research* (1994)—but I look forward to it.). Williams’s wrath, however, is reserved for economic positivists who have not only “confine[d] their research to confirming evidence,” but also “systematically falsified the economic portrait” of postwar Japan, Taiwan, and South Korea (82).

Williams urges that we heed Kant’s call in *The Critique of Pure Reason* for methodological tolerance (220). He advocates a “a vigorous, anti-positivist empiricism” (22) based
upon solid language skills: "No knowledge of positive laws...can substitute for...linguistic expertise" (24). Arguing that political science is above all a "language act" (160), Williams laments that most positivists are linguistic nominalists, understating "the opacity of linguistic codes" (198) and the difficulties of translation. His prose is eloquent: "We think with words. To the degree that the student of politics and society suffers from what Louis Massignon, the great French Orientalist, once called soif ontologique (ontological thirst), the social scientist should drink in language" (157). Because "cultures imprison," Williams demands that the social scientist acquire "tribal knowledge" through fieldwork. He prefers a good journalist to an armchair positivist.

*Japan and the Enemies of Open Political Science* is, above all, a "Call to Arms". Williams sees Western students of Japanese politics as "twice marginalized". First, Japan is external to the privileged Euro-American civilization. Second, political science itself is marginalized vis-à-vis its more "scientific" neighbors: neoliberal economics and behavioral psychology (262). For Williams, however, adversity can be transformed into opportunity. With the emergence of a new canonical text, he argues, the marginal can redefine the discipline. *Japan and the Enemies* is a powerful pep talk for such an undertaking, and it inspires.

The main problem with *Japan and the Enemies*, however, is likely to be one of audience. I fear it will not receive the readership it deserves. At a broad level, it is addressing social scientists studying the non-West; its narrow audience is students of Japanese politics. There is a generational problem among most area studies scholars, however: the older generation tends to have the background in Western political philosophy, but not the language skills that Williams demands; while the younger generation has better language skills, but at the expense of a grounding in the Western tradition. *Japan and the Enemies* will likely be most appreciated by political theorists, who, unfortunately, generally lack the language skills necessary to undertake the anthropological, empiricist approach Williams advocates.

**Notes**

1. The aside here about the poor again reveals Hegel’s influence on Williams: Hegel was profoundly pessimistic in the *Philosophy of Right* about the ability of the welfare state to rectify the problem of poverty.
2. I borrow this phrase from Lu Xun’s collection of short stories of that name.