Arthur F. Bentley:
Politics and the Mystery of Society

The Process of Government: A Study of Social Pressures. By Arthur F. Bentley; edited by Peter H. Odegard. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967). Originally published in 1908.

Makers, Users and Masters. By Arthur F. Bentley; edited by Sidney Ratner. (Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, 1969).

Relativity in Man and Society. By Arthur F. Bentley. (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1926).

Behavior Knowledge Fact. By Arthur F. Bentley. (Bloomington, IN: The Principia *Press,* 1935).

Inquiry into Inquiries: Essays in Social Theory. By Arthur F. Bentley; edited by Sidney Ratner. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1954) .

"Epilogue," in *Life, Language, Law: Essays in Honor of Arthur F. Bentley.* By Arthur F. Bentley; edited by Richard W. Taylor. (Yellow Springs, Ohio: The Antioch Press, 1957).

Knowing and the Known. By Arthur F. Bentley with John Dewey. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1949).

"Historians who live in democratic ages, then, not only deny that the few have any power of acting upon the destiny of a people, but deprive the people themselves, of the power of modifying their own conditions, and they subject them either to an inflexible Providence or to some blind necessity ... The historians of antiquity taught how to command; those of our 0Wn time teach only how to obey." - Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America.*

The Perennial Arthur Bentley

Arthur F. Bentley's reputation is one of the most curious in the history *of* American political science. Hailed by some as a pioneer, scorned by others as *a* menace, he *is* a regular feature of political science bibliographies. Arthur Bentley seems important, somehow, though there is no agreement about why. This is all the more curious because Bentley never considered himself a political scientist, and in fact held the profession in low esteem. He never

joined the American Political Science Association and never sat on a political science faculty. In fact, Bentley's work fits no single discipline very well, and so can be claimed indiscriminately by many: by sociology, linguistics, economics, philosophy, even physics, the one branch of knowledge Bentley felt truly deserved to be called a science.'

Moreover, little of Bentley's work (especially from his later years) is well-known among political scientists, and his reputation rests almost entirely on one work, *The Process of Government,* published in 1908. That work solidly established Bentley as a forerunner of group theory and pluralism, even though Bentley did not much appreciate his induction by those schools, and denied his affinity with "the group concept" in its conventional form ("Epilogue," 212).

Bentley would much rather have been remembered for his association with John Dewey, and for the work they did, singly and together, in linguistic philosophy. Dewey and Bentley shared many attitudes and concerns, the most significant being their belief that ordinary language was inadequate for expressing scientific truth, and both devoted much of their professional lives to constructing a new language. This was the goal to which Bentley devoted the remainder of his long career after the publication of *The Process of Government* (although the concern with language and science is evident throughout that book as well), and it is the pursuit for which he is most remembered outside the political science profession. [2]

Yet political scientists continue to rediscover the "group" Bentley. Friends of that approach hail him; enemies denounce him. But most agree that it is for the invention of group theory that Bentley should be remembered. *The Process of Government* was used in this sense by Charles Beard and Charles Merriam in their graduate classes in the 1920s and 1930s. It was cited by the numerous chroniclers of pressure groups in the 1930s and 1940s. And it was rediscovered by the interest group theorists of the 1950s, most notably by David

1. When he died, in 1957, his **obituary was published in the journals of three disciplines: philosophy, sociology, and political science.**

2. On Bentley's association with Dewey, ***see:*** *John Dewey and Arthur F. Bentley: A Philosophical Correspondence,* ***1932-1951,*** **edited by Sidney Ratner and Jules Altman, with James Wheeler (New Brunswick, N. J.: Rutgers University Press, 1984); Arthur F. Bentley and John Dewey, "Concerning a Vocabulary for Inquiry into Knowledge,"** *Journal of Philosophy* ***44*** **(1947): 421-33; Arthur F. Bentley and John Dewey, "Interaction and Transaction,"** *Journal of Philosophy* **43 (1948): 505-518; and Arthur F. Bentley, "Decrassifying Dewey,"** *Philosophy of Science* **8 (1941): 147-158.**

Truman in *The Governmental Process.* So why discover Bentley one more time? As John Schaar and Sheldon Wolin have asked, "Is there anything left to say about Arthur Bentley?"

I think there is, for this reason: An examination of the work Bentley did after *The Process of Government* sheds light on the larger purposes of that first book, and reveals the depths of the metaphysical confusion into which Bentley wandered in pursuit of those purposes. Furthermore, a study of Bentley's later work suggests more precisely the way in which his approach to the study of politics reflected and then departed from the approach of more conventional political scientists.

Bentley made his chief contribution to the literature of political science when the discipline was very young. The response to that contribution presents us with a snapshot of a discipline struggling to find a theme. *The Process of Government* was published only five years after the founding of the American Political Science Association, before there were political science departments in more than a score of colleges. As difficult as it is to assign influence to a work, it is nevertheless clear that Bentley shared many of the aspirations of his colleagues in the intellectual community, as eccentric as he must have seemed to many of them.[4] Like them, Bentley was eager to discover the nature of the science that seemed to promise so much at the turn of the century, and to learn what it could teach to the students of society.

Bentley was bewitched by science, and determined to bring its methods to the study of society. With Dewey, Beard, James, and others, Bentley hoped to dethrone the ancient gods of philosophy and religion and replace them with more modern ones.[5] And among the expendable gods were the gods of politics, the "spooks" and "soul stuff" of ideas and ideals. The new gods would be taken from the raw data of social experience; the new social scientist would devote

3. For an example of the former, see David B. Truman, *The Governmental Process* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1951). For the latter, see Leo Weinstein, "The Group Approach: Arthur F. Bentley," in *Essays on the Scientific Study of Politics,* ed. Herbert Storing (New York: Holt, Rinehart, 1982), 151-223. The quotation from Schaar and Wolin is found in their review of the Storing volume, *"Essays on the Scientific Study of Politics:* A Critique, *American Political Science Review* 57 (1983): 129.

4. Norman Jacobson, "Causality and Time in the Political Process: A Speculation," *American Political Science Review* 58 (1984): 15-22.

5. Morton White, *Social Thought in America: The Revolt Against Formalism,* 2nd. ed. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1957).

himself to the observation of social fact and nothing else.

Another reason for studyi Bentley has been suggested by Norman Jacobson, who argues at Bentley provided the link between early American constitutio al theory and later American political science. Bentley took the thought central to the Federalist tradition-that social groups are the given from which politics must build as best it can-and tried to make it into a science.° As we shall see later, Bentley was not so much concerned with groups per se as with social activity, what he constantly referred to as "men actually doing something in the world." This activity, according to Bentley, simply exists: it is not the business of political science (or the state) to impose meaning on it, or to order or shape it any way. What Bentley had most in common with the Federalists (and the comparison can easily be overdrawn) was a radical skepticism about politics itself: in their case a doubt about the ability of the political order to'reform the disruptive passions of social groups; in Bentley's case, a doubt about the basic *reality* of the political order, its philosophic coherence. To both Bentley and the Federalists, the pretensions of the statesman were humbled by the reality of the group.

Bentley is also important because political science *seems* to owe him so much. I emphasize the word *seems* because this influence is not easy to trace and turns out, I believe, to be something other than what three generations of political scientists have represented it to be. Obviously, Bentley did not discover the group. At least since Federalist No. 10, America has appeared to countless observers to be a society in which private, utilitarian social groups have been of paramount importance. The group literature written since the 1920s could certainly have been written (and was, in most cases) without any noticeable help from *The Process of Government.'*

But what political science does owe to Bentley is the benefit of his example of how the traditional group orientation of American

8. Norman Jacobson, "Political Science and Political Education," *American Political Science Review 57 (1983):* 581.

7. Some of the group studies which did acknowledge Bentley's inspiration or guidance were: Peter Odegard, *Pressure Politics* (1920); Merle Curti, *The Growth of American Thought* (1943); Pendleton Herring, *Group Representation Before Congress (1920);* E. E. Schattschneider, *Politics, Pressures, and the Tariff* (1935); Belle Zeller, *Pressure Politics in New York* (1937); Dayton McKean, *Pressures on the Legislature of New Jersey* (1938); Oliver Garceau, *The Political Life of the American Medical Association* (1941); and Bertram Gross, *The Legislative Struggle* (1951). Also, of course, Truman's *The Governmental Process* (1951).

political thought could be translated into the scientific language that was becoming obligatory by the first decades of the twentieth century. Many political scientists of the past fifty years have approached Bentley as a prophet without honor in his own time, and their admiration is a tribute to the sheer audacity of Bentley's ambition, which was no less than the reconstruction of all social knowledge. That ambition knew no bounds. All previous theory was suspect, if not obviously false, and parts of *The Process of Government* echo the arrogance of *The Communist Manifesto.* A great spectre was haunting social theory, Bentley declared-the spectre of science. The whole temple of learning would have to be cleansed before the new priests could occupy the property. An exciting prospect, no doubt, to the men of Bentley's generation.

But questions must be asked about the example Bentley set, especially for political science. The discipline of political science, in its early years, had more complex motives than the desire to make political studies more scientific. It was moved also by its members' sense of an impending crisis in American political life. Like so many of his colleagues, Bentley sought the resolution to that crisis outside of the political order itself, in the more "basic" relationship which lay "below" or "behind" politics. By denying the specifically *political* nature of the crisis, Bentley set a standard that would be emulated by his successors; and in so doing, he established a pattern of inquiry that for over sixty years has displayed a curious ambivalence toward the ostensible subject of political study: the polity itself.

"The Mystery of Society"

Arthur Bentley was born in Freeport, Illinois, in 1870, the son of a prosperous banker. He was educated in public schools in Illinois and Nebraska, then entered York College in Denver, spending one semester there before dropping out for reasons of health in 1887. Bentley then took up a position in his father's bank, where he worked until 1890. His health restored, he continued his education at Johns Hopkins University, where he intended to study economics under Richard Ely; but Ely left Hopkins soon after Bentley's arrival, leaving the young man on the loose" (as he later termed it). In 1892 Bentley published an M.A. thesis on "The Condition of the Western

Farmer," and promptly embarked on his *Wanderfahre* in Europe.[8]

Later in life; Bentley would confess that he got very little out of his years at Johns Hopkins, and even less out of his experience in Germany, where he spent the academic year of 1892-93. In 1953 he recalled that he wanted to combine sociology and economics in some fashion, but that he was still on the loose and looking for an intellectual anchor. He failed to find it, apparently, in Europe.

Bentley's roommate on that journey, Hutchins Hapgood, has described him in a memoir, A *Victorian in the Modern World,* as a "strangely vivid young man" much distressed by the "mystery of society" and passionately devoted to solving it. Hapgood described Bentley

> wandering through the slums of London [observing] the mass of suffering human beings ... so unhappy that they didn't even know they were unhappy ... Ever since that time Bentley has been working, and still is working, on that effort to solve the problem of human beings in organized society . . . Bentley's passionate desire to discover the sociological ultimate revealed an infinite mental turmoil. He was an unhappy soul, bitterly critical of himself and his inability to reach the heights.[9]

When he returned to Johns Hopkins, Bentley began a doctoral dissertation which attempted to find his "sociological ultimate" in the individual. "The Units of Investigation in the Social Sciences" was accepted in 1895, and represented the first of many conceptions of the "sociological ultimate" which Bentley would discard as inadequate.[10]

Bentley's teaching career began and ended the following year at the University of Chicago, where he was hired as a docent of sociology. After a few classes he and his students agreed to part company, and Bentley never held a regular teaching position again. (Late in his life he taught a seminar at Columbia University for one semester.) During this year Bentley met John Dewey, while attending one of Dewey's lectures; this acquaintance was taken up again many years later and developed into a close professional collabora-

8. Sidney Ratner, "Arthur F, Bentley's Inquiries into the Behavioral Sciences and the **Theory** of Scientific Inquiry," *British Journal of* ***Sociology*** *8* (1957): **40-43.**

9. Cited in Paul Kress, *Social Science and the Idea of* ***Process: The Ambiguous*** *Legacy of Arthur F. Bentley* (Urbana, Ill.: University of Illinois Press, 1970), 1e. This **book** was extremely helpful in preparing this essay.

10. Ratner, "Bentley's Inquiries," **40-43.**

tion, one of the few personal contacts Bentley ever had with the wider intellectual community. [11]

In 1900 Bentley got a job as a reporter for the Chicago *Times-Herald* and *Record-Herald.* He was promoted to editorial writer in 1903, which gave him much free time for the continuation of his education in the social sciences. The local library contained a wealth of material on politics; his job provided him with much more. Thus he set about the composition of the *The Process of Goverment. In* 1911, again for health reasons (apparently a nervous collapse brought on by the labors of writing) Bentley quit newspaper work and retired to a farm in Paoli, Indiana, where he lived for the rest of his life.

From this rustic retreat Bentley sent forth a torrent of articles and manuscripts, and this, with the exception of his correspondence with Dewey, was his sole contact with the intellectual world which he so ardently desired to reform. It is a mark of his persistence that the academic world remembers him at all, given the difficulty non-professionals have in gaining acceptance by professional communities. Yet when he died in 1957, Bentley was remembered as a sociologist, a linguist, a philosopher, and a political scientist.

Although he described himself as being intellectually on the loose, he was not, of course, isolated from the philosophical movements and currents of his time. As unsatisfactory as his education seemed to him to have been, it introduced him to one of the major influences on his development-the European sociological schools represented by Ludwig Gumplowicz, Georg Simmel, and Gustav Ratzenhofer. [12] These schools had characteristics with which American social science would become increasingly familiar in the years to come. The Europeans (Gumplowicz and Simmel, especially) were concerned to divorce sociology from the philosophy of history and idealism. For them, the primary fact of social life was not the meaning to be discovered in it, but its impermanence, its flux. Sociologists would have to seek meaning *in* change, rather than hope to impose meaning *onto* the chaos of experience. For Simmel, the "central tension" in science was the attempt to reconcile "ordered thought" with the flux of experience-not, as the classics would have it, the other way around.j [13]

11 Ibid.

12. Kress, *Social Science,* 26-35.

13 Ibid.

From the Germans (and their American followers) Bentley took the notion of group conflict as the engine of this impermanence. Society emerged out of the conflict of groups; the conflict of groups shaped the past and would determine the future. Bentley was especially familiar with Albion Small and the "Chicago school" of conflict theorists, and in general agreement with Small's belief that sociology must deal with the "mechanisms of the [social] process rather than . . . the content of the process." In *General Sociology* (1905) Small wrote:

> Our present thesis anticipates nothing with reference to the nature of the social process, or its mechanism, or its results. We are concerned at the start merely with the empty, formal conception that, so far as it goes, whether taken in its minutest fragments or in the largest reaches which we can contemplate, human experience is a congeries of occurrences which have their meaning by reference to each other."

The second major influence on Bentley's development took root when he met John Dewey. Bentley associated himself thereafter with the pragmatist movement in philosophy, although he differed from some of its major emphases in important respects. Morton White has labelled this movement a "revolt against formalism." Bernard Crick has called it a "revolt against politics itself."[15] Both labels apply to Bentley. White has said of the pragmatists that "all of them insist on coming to grips with life, experience, process, growth, context, function. They are all products of the historical and cultural ° emphases of the nineteenth century, following, being influenced by, reacting from its great philosophers of change and process."[18] Crick remarks of these same thinkers that they displayed a general concern for "objectivity," which they tended to view as the power of "facts" to overthrow prejudice and superstition. , Like Bentley, they were eager to oppose the older authorities in the ame of a science that was willing to look without blinking at the realities

14. Ibid., *98-99.* See also Samuel Krislov, "What is an Interest? The Rival Answers of Bentley, Pound, and Maclver," *Western Political Quarterly* 16 *(1963): 831-833.* Significantly, Max Weber is not mentioned in *The Process of Government,* although his agricultural studies had been published in the 1890s and Bentley was, of course, thoroughly at home in German.

15. White, *Social* ***Thought;*** Bernard Crick, *The American Science of Politics: Its Origins and Conditions* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1959).

16. White, *Social* ***Thought,*** **13.**

of society." "Facts are hard things," C.S. Pierce had written, "which do not consist in my thinking so and so, but stand unmoved by whatever you or I or any man or generations of men may opine about them.'[18]

Most of the pragmatists shared another attitude with Bentley and with the social science of his day. This attitude was best expressed by Charles Beard, when he remarked in *a* Columbia lecture in 1908 that "man as a political animal acting upon political, *as distinguished from more vital and powerful motives,* is the most unsubstantial of all abstractions . . . . The human being is not essentially different when he is depositing his ballot from what he is in the counting house or at the work bench." It was one of Bentley's main intentions in writing *The Process of Government* to demonstrate the insubstantiality of politics, and to promote the view that he who wishes to understand society must look behind or below the political order, as Beard claimed to be doing when he wrote *An Economic Interpretation of the Constitution five* years later.

But Bentley departed from the pragmatists and their allies in one important respect. He was more philosophically ambitious than they, less concerned with institutions and history, more consistent in his objectivity. He opposed all dualisms, including the popular dualism of fact and value, insisting that his own writings were no less an expression of group affiliations than anyone else's, and that all facts were equally suspect until proved.[20] He was also less evolutionary than Beard or historians such as James Harvey Robinson, who *saw* history as the record of progress from the simple to the complex.[21] According to Bentley, there was no warrant for such teleology, and while he accepted natural selection and attempted to work it into his system, he was skeptical of much of the implications of Social Darwinism, including the theory of progress.

Bentley took these varied strains and concerns and constructed out of them something much greater than the sum of their parts, but

17. Crick, ***The American Science,*** **73-94.**

18. Cited in Kress, *Social* ***Science, 23.***

19. White, ***Social Thought,*** 30. My emphasis. On the anti-political component of modern social science, see Sheldon Wolin, *Politics and Vision* (Boston: Little, Brown, *1960).* The view of modern social science, Wolin argues, is "that there are no distinctively political phenomena and hence no special set of problems . . ." *(288).*

20. See for example Arthur F. Bentley, *Relativity in Man and Society* (New York: G. P. Putnams' Sons, 1928), 195, where *he* confesses that his support for world peace only expresses certain of his group interests (he doesn't say which ones).

21. White, *Social* ***Thought,*** **53-54.**

something recognizable nonetheless as the product of a distinct intellectual tradition.

"... we must fly to activity"

The Process of Government has seemed many things to many people. To Charles Beard it was a "thought-provoking book that will help to put politics on a basis of realism, where it belongs." James Garner, however, reviewing the book for the *American Political Science Review,* found it of "little value as a contribution to the literature of political science." Charles Merriam and Harry Elmer Barnes praised the book in the *History of Political Theories in Recent Times,* in 1924, which marked the first of many rediscoveries of Bentley. Morris Cohen discovered the book again in the 193Os, calling it the most important contribution to political theory in America in three hundred years.[22] The book lay fallow once again until 1950, when Bertram Gross reviewed a new edition for the *Review,* calling it one of the "most important books on government ever written in America," and attributing its neglect to the fact that Bentley had never been a member of the political science community, and that pressure-group analysis had not been respectable when the book was first published.[23] Shortly thereafter David Truman rediscovered Bentley, perhaps decisively, in *The Governmental Process.* Since then Bentley's work has achieved the status of a classic.

Yet the estimates of its worth vary considerably. They range from that of Sidney Ratner ("the most important contribution to systematic political theory ever made in America") to that of the contributors to Herbert Storing's volume, *Essays on the Scientific Study of Politics,* who hold Bentley responsible for much of what they see as having gone wrong in the discipline. In between we might place Arnold Brecht's more cautious estimate of Bentley's lifework as "vague." More recently, Paul Kress has argued that Bentley's work failed to meet the standards he himself set for a valid social science.[24]

22. Charles Beard's review appeared in the ***Political Science Quarterly*** **23** (1909): 739-741; Garner's review appeared in the ***American Political Science Review 3*** (1908): 457; Morris Cohen is quoted by Ratner, "Bentley's Inquiries," 45.

23. In the *American Political Science Review 44* (1950): 742-743.

24. Sidney Ratner, "Arthur F. Bentley, 1870-1957," *Journal of* ***Philosophy*** 55 (1958): 574; Storing, ed., *Essays;* Arnold Brecht, ***Political Theory; The Foundations of Twentieth-Century Political Thought*** (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967), 513; Kress, *Social Science,* passim.

Kress also points out that *The Process of Government* worked with a conception of groups very much different from that used by the many group theorists who later claimed Bentley as their inspiration.[25] And John Schaar and Sheldon Wolin have suggested that Bentley's work "was guided by a thoroughly philosophical orientation and intention, which we doubt whether even his acknowledged followers have begun to understand, let alone accept."[26] Bentley himself described The *Process of Government* as "an account in terms of `group interests,' understanding by this, of course, something far broader in scope than the `interest groups' of conventional presentation" ("Epilogue," 212). Kress suggests that American political scientists were simply unable, by training and inclination, to respond to the more philosophical Bentley, and were more attracted to the empiricism of Bentley's discussion of groups. The more philosophical component of *The Process of Government,* Kress notes, is the idea of "process analysis."

> Those political scientists who have accepted Bentley's teaching seem to have made the 'group' their central concept and to have allowed `process' to become the general milieu in which the group 'functions.' As a consequence, the level of theoretical focus has been shifted from the philosophical to the empirical plane.[27]

The Process of Government begins with a long attack on the "language of everyday life" and its reliance on metaphysics. "My concern," Bentley announces, "is ... always with the process of social life," and never with the hypostasized "things" to which language assigns meanings: the "spooks and soul stuff" such as "ideas, ideals, feelings, and faculties." Feelings and faculties are "irresponsible and unmeasurable,"animistic but useless elements in the explanation of social fact. In everyday life, the use of such concepts as feelings and ideals is good enough, but in science it can lead only to error *(Process, 3-5).* What social science needs most of all is a language free from ambiguity and metaphysical control *(Process,* 1-3).[28]

Thus, *process* is to be the key organizing concept of social science,

25. Kress, *Social Science,* 81-82.

26. Schaar and Wolin, "Essays," 132.

27. Kress, *Social Science, xi.*

28. Taylor, *Life, Language, Law, 5.* Nonetheless, as we shall see, by the end of his career, "process" had grown to be a powerful metaphysic.

a "tool" whose primary function is to resolve "the *conceptual* problems of `stating.'[29] Bentley insists that this problem poisons all of our communication, from the simplest statements of day-to-day life to the highest levels of social theory. To say, for example, that a man is "tricky" or "kind" is to assume the validity of a complicated metaphysics that cannot be tested or proved.

> Now the feature of these personal qualities to which attention must specifically be given is that they are looked upon as a sort of 'thing' acting among other `things' in the social world. They are a sort of `stuff,' different, or not different, as one likes, from the material `stuff' of the world, but in either case interacting with the latter in series of events that can be linked together, with each event in the series explaining the other that comes after it. . The real question . . . is why the living, acting men and women change their forms of action, cease to do now what they did formerly, use their `qualities' in some places and not in others, in short live the particular social lives they do live *(Process, 5, 18).*

The personification of qualities cannot answer such questions, Bentley finds, because we cannot "show either qualitative changes in it, or quantitative increases in some form of it" *(Process,* 19).

In politics, the attempt to use qualities or ideals as causative agents leads to total confusion. The ideals expressed in a Fourth of July speech, for example, bear little or no relation to the realities of politics or history. The party meeting and the oratory produced there, to be sure, are facts, but when it comes to taking the proclamations of ideas and ideals, word for word, at the values set forth in the speeches, what is the use of discussion?" Ideals are only "dry thin, bloodless" abstractions until they are expressed as some form of group activity: until, that is, they become action *(Process,* 110-114). Once they become action, and can be observed, there is no longer any need even to refer to the "spooks" that allegedly "caused" them. As the personification of qualities has led to confusion in everyday language, so too has it destroyed scholarship. We have, Bentley insists, a dead political science and a dead sociology. The works of van Jhering, Ward, Morgan, Spencer, Giddings, Dicey, Marx, Mill, Willoughby, Ely, H.C. Adams, and Durkheim are criticized for their dependence on personified ideals and other abstractions in analyzing society. Nothing can be learned by treating ideals, ideas, and feelings as independent or even semi-independent variables. "What trifling meaning they have will appear only when they are

29. **Kress,** *Social* ***Science, 42.***

seen from beneath where lie the wheels within the wheels. On the surface, taken at their own valuation, they are but illusion... . Beyond content and process there is nothing at all" *(Process,* 153, 117).

Bentley takes care to warn the reader that he does not believe that feelings and ideals have no reality at all. They merely have no reality as a cause or explanation of anything. Ideal-following people are among the things science must study; ideals are thus important as bits of data. It is ideals-as-cause that Bentley denies:

> What I have thus far said amounts to about this: that the `feelings,"faculties,' 'ideas,' and 'ideals' are not definite `things' in or behind society, working upon it as causes, but that they are-or rather, what is meant by them is-society itself, stated in a very clumsy and inadequate way *(Process,* 165).[30]

It is the activity itself, which traditional social science assumes to be the *result* of an ideal, which is the only reality the ideal can have; the feeling or ideal is the activity. There is nothing of importance in society but observable effects *(Process,* 165).

Bentley was sensitive to the charge that he was denying any importance or meaning beyond what could be observed, and measured, and he attempted to answer that charge in advance by claiming that activity possessed as much meaning as any spook or "idea ghost."

> In casting them out [i.e., feelings and ideals] we must be very careful not to cast out that meaning, that order, with them . . . [But] if we can get the activities analyzed we may be very confident that no feelings and no ideas will get lost in the process *(Process,* 166, 198).

Yet this defense leaves many questions unanswered. To transfer the focus of attention from the "feelings-as-cause" to the "activity-as-fact" does not obviate the search for meaning. We may agree that it is idle to explain the storming of the Bastille by saying that Parisians were animated by a love of liberty. But to describe that event in the minutest detail and then stop may still leave something unsaid. We may still wonder why it happened when it did, whether it was right or wrong, if it had any significant consequences, and so on. But how are we to derive meaning or order from the process of events without reintroducing spooks? (Bentley would flounder in

30. Also, see Jacobson, "Political Science and Political Education," 567.

these waters for the rest of his life, conjuring spooks of his own, such as interest, to explain apparently-meaningless social behavior.) A hint of the use Bentley saw for process analysis is suggested by his comment that the "feeling elements" symbolize "certain regularities or tendencies in activity stated as individual conduct." In other words, activity is to be observed, recorded, and then sifted for previously invisible patterns, and these patterns must not be influenced by preconceived notions of meaning or order. For example, if a boy is kind to a dog, he will probably also be kind to other animals, and we are therefore tempted to say that the boy is "kind". But we mean by that only we have observed a "patterned regularity" in the boy's behavior and given it the symbol, *kind.* This pattern, however, is not complete, for the boy is not kind to mosquitoes. Thus, we need to make the feeling or idea increasingly specific in order to fit the facts; then it "becomes the same thing as our activity itself" *(Process,* 168, 169). Process, consequently, leads to activity. "We must fly to activity," Bentley urged.

> We must deal with felt things, not with feelings, with intelligent life, not idea ghosts. We deal with felt facts and with thought facts, but not with feeling as reality or with thought as truth. We must find the only reality and only truth in the proper functioning of the felt facts and the thought facts in the system to which they belong *(Process, 172).*

By *felt facts* and *thought facts* Bentley meant activity itself, the "men-doing-something which we actually observe-which is all that we *can* observe-when we look at the world. Here is the raw material of social science. The raw material of study is "first, last, and always activity, action, `something doing,' the shunting by some men of other men's conduct along changed lines, the gathering of forces to overcome resistance to such alterations, or the dispersal of one grouping of forces by another grouping." The raw material is the relations among men; or rather, the relations among men *are* the activity. Even Bentley has difficulty expressing this complex idea concretely enough for his purposes:

> The activities are interlaced. That, however, is a bad manner of expression. For the interlacing itself is the activity. We have one great moving process to study, and of this great moving process *it is impossible to state any part except as valued* in *terms of the other parts (Process,* 176-178. My emphasis).

Activity is always deceptive. Behind each activity lie other, more

fundamental activities. Thus, the scientist must not only study the passage of laws, but the "actually performed legislating-administering-adjudicating activities in the nation and in the streams and currents of activity that gather among the people and rush into these spheres" *(Process, 180).* Language, too, is deceptive, a "sea of words in which political movements swim." It must be analyzed as activity and never taken at face value. (Even though a sea is a substantial reality, especially for those who swim in it. More on this subject below in the section entitled, *"a sea of words. ")*

Seemingly familiar events must always be broken down into their component activity segments. Each activity is really a relation among many separate activities, each influencing the other. All of these parts must be taken up together and included in a single, all-encompassing statement. Take the simple case of a man getting angry. We must see his face, his fists, his body "poised as if to spring." However, because we are unwilling to invent a soul-state ("anger") to explain this activity, we "must try what we can do by getting all the activities that are involved stated as fully as possible." And this will include the "many tendencies" in his world that are "working through him at the same time. All the troublesome human soul states can be reduced to terms of human activity *(Process,* 188-94).

Measurement is the core of science, according to Bentley. Human activity, considered simply as bits of action, is quantifiable, or at least potentially so. (Bentley was skeptical of the possibilities of quantification, more so in his later years than in 1908; but he always hoped that new methods would be discovered that would improve the quantification of social facts.) But we cannot measure an ideal. We can only measure the actions that *are* the ideal. We can measure wars, votes, referenda results, and so on. We can "go far back and examine the quantities that have been in play to produce the given results.

> The quantities are present in every bit of political life. There is no political process that is not a balancing of quantity against quantity. There is not a law that is passed that is not the expression of force and force in tension. There is not a court decision or an executive act that is not the result of the same process. Understanding any of these phenomena means measuring the elements that have gone into them. . , The statement that takes us farthest along the road toward quantitative estimates will inevitably be the best statement *(Process,* 200).

It is from quantifiable activity that Bentley's version of group

theory is derived. Surveying the world's activity, discovering its patterned regularity, we do not see individuals doing this or that thing. We see activity "aggregated." We see men acting together, even when they do not know that they act together. Every act of communication presumes the existence of specified or unspecified others. We never act alone. It is in this sense that we see groups of men. Bentley's notion of group is much more general and philosophical than that used by the interest-group school of political science since the 1920s. It is not *organizations* that Bentley has in mind when he uses the word `group'. It is *categories.* He applies the word `group' to organizations, per se, but also to nations, races, religions, the Supreme Court, cities and towns, classes, occupations, opinions-to any recognizable category whatsoever. Group is simply a "mass activity . . . so many men, acting, or *tending* toward action" *(Process,* 211. My emphasis).

To make this concept clearer, Bentley used a favorite metaphor, which would reappear in later works. Society can be pictured as a sphere through which various planes (representing the categories to be studied) have been passed; each plane defines a group, but many of the planes intersect. The task of picturing these intersections is difficult, but with practice, Bentley assures us, it becomes easier. These planes are purely analytical; the scientist places them where he will, according to whatever category he wishes to study. He might choose to sort out all men with red hair, or all workers, or Catholics, or farmers. The important observation to be derived from this exercise is not the categories themselves, but their intersections, for these intersections are the clues to human behavior. "What a man states to himself as his argument or reasoning or thinking about a national issue is, from the more exact point of view, just the conflict of the crossed groups to which he belongs." What men say is important only in so far as it can provide clues pointing to *interest.* The reasoning comes after the fact. "Indeed, the only reality of the ideas is their reflection of the groups, only that and nothing more. The ideas can be stated in terms of the groups; the groups never in terms of the ideas"[47] *(Process,* 204-06).

Bentley's interest in groups is therefore methodological, not empirical. He makes no systematic attempt to describe the familiar groups in American politics, their operations or their origins.[31] The

31. In the Appendix to *Process,* Bentley offered a sample of a process analysis of the organizations active in Chicago, but it was very sketchy, as he himself admitted.

group concept mated to the process/activity concept is the "tool" that Bentley announced in the beginning, the "hook into reality" for which he had so desperately searched. The reason for concentrating on *political* groups is trivial. Political groups are highly "differentiated," which makes them easier to study. Moreover, political groups, because they "reflect" or "represent" other, more fundamental groups (such as social or economic groups) are the first step in the chain of analysis, the first probe into the complex reality of society. A full social science would state all of the groups, and on this point Bentley is uncompromising. Aggregated activity is the beginning and the end of social reality. It is what social science is meant to study: that, and nothing else. Bentley's insistence on this point it well-known:

> When the groups are adequately stated, everything is stated. When I say everything, I mean everything. The complete description will mean the complete science *(Process, 209).*

. . beneath the argument lies strength."

If the group is a methodological concept, its empirical manifestation is interest. The way to discover interest, in turn, is to analyze activity. Activity is the spoor of interest; the first leads to the second. Or to use Bentley's more cautious phrase, the interest and the activity are two phases of the same thing. It is fruitless to say that interest underlies activity. This is to introduce a false sense of causation into the analysis and to reintroduce a particularly noxious variety of "soul stuff." Interest is simply a "commonality factor that has social consequences."[32] Activity is the observable phase of this commonality factor, the phase most open to empirical observation. However, they are always found together. *There is no such thing as an unstated interest.* And just as there is no interest without activity, there is no group without an interest.

> An interest, as the term will be used in this work, is the equivalent of a group. The group and the interest are not separate. There exists only the one thing, that is, so many men bound together in or along the path of a certain activity *(Process,* 212).

32. Kress, *Social Science, 69.*

The question of which came first-the group or the interest-is the sort of question Bentley would dismiss as meaningless. "What we actually find in this world, what we can observe and study, is interested men, nothing more and nothing less. That is our raw material and it is our business to keep our eyes fastened on it" *(Process,* 212).

Because interest and activity are two phases of the same thing, they can only be judged in terms of one another-never in terms of some third standard, such as ideals. We can never, for example, judge a group's interest by reading its literature or listening to its speeches. We can only observe what the group *does* (or, rather, what the people composing it do) . And if a group's behavior appears erratic, this is only a trick of perception. The political scientist must discover the logic of group behavior by plotting each step in the progression from activity to group interest. When the scientist has it "all together-the group, the activity, and the interest"-then the meaning will be apparent *(Process, 213-214).*

The steps in the process are these. The observer must isolate a particular activity. Then he must describe the interest being put forward *in terms of* the course of action being followed by the group (and this is the only way in which interest can be delineated). Then the observer must consider the power of the group vis-a-vis other groups-the number of members it has, the intensity of their interest, the techniques of operation. The final step in the procedure is to consider the context of the group's activity-no group can be understood except in terms of its environment (a word which has no clear limits for Bentley). All group activities are part of a system, each exerting continual pressure on the others *(Process,* 217).

Further, activity and interest have no past; they exist only in the present. Although Bentley would later radically change his views on this subject, when he wrote *The Process of Government* he was persistently and dogmatically ahistorical. The past had simply ceased to have any bearing on the present. "Long, in point of time, as may be the trains of activity which we must follow [in analyzing activity], we never grasp them except at some present moment" *(Process,* 219) . He would almost completely reverse this rule in *Relativity in Man and Society (1926),* by which time he had come to believe that the analysis of behavior must take into account the eternities of time stretching backwards and forwards from the present.

The identification of interest with group defines out of existence any conception of a specifically public interest. The public, not be-

ing a group, cannot have an interest.[33] Or, to be more precise, since we never see the public *acting* as a group we cannot treat it as such (since there can be no group where there is no activity). Bentley's denial of a public interest is a consequence of his observation of the ubiquity of social conflict. "The phenomena of political life which we study will always divide the society in which they occur, along lines which are very real, though of varying degrees of definiteness. The society itself is nothing other than the complex of groups that compose it" *(Process,* 222. Also see 220). But it is also a consequence of Bentley's basic orientation. The American public is too much like a mental construct, a thing conjured by the will, to suit Bentley. (As Woodrow Wilson put it, "the letters . . . do not make a complete word."[34] That suited Bentley fine.) It is too unwieldly an abstraction to be granted status as a unit of analysis. He is quite convinced that we never see such a thing as a public, let alone a public interest. Statements to the contrary, he notes, are usually only facades covering a group interest.

It was Bentley's belief that concentrating on activity and interest, the investigator would be able to get behind the surface manifestations of politics-such as formal laws and institutions-to the reality of social life. That reality was a bubbling, churning mass of activity and if it appeared meaningless when looked at this way, then, Bentley would say, we have gotten close to the essential truth. We have stripped away the false meaning, the false categories, and begun anew with the raw material itself. Accepting the chaos of social life was the first step towards understanding it.

With this in mind Bentley turned his attention to the government and other specifically political "groups" in society: a list which included public opinion and law. Where other investigators had concentrated on the formal institutions, Bentley would use the process/group/activity tool to see them with fresh eyes.

Public opinion is "an expression of, by or for a group of people." This is the only sense of the word *public* that Bentley recognizes: "a general name for masses of groups at a certain stage of the process." Public opinion is the verbal expression of the condition, at any given moment, of the interest-group struggle. It is another form of activity, since speaking, writing, expressions of any form are to be seen for

33. Schaar and Wolin, "Essays," 138.

34. Woodrow Wilson, "The Law and the Facts," *American Political Science Review* 5 (1911): 7.

what they are: *men-doing-something.* The analysis of public opinion helps us to see "what interest groups are most active, what are dominating, what are absorbing others into themselves to their increased activity, what are the representative relations between them *(Process,* 244).

Government has very little to do in this scheme of things except to perform "governing functions for the underlying groups of the population *(Process,* 260-261). Bentley is no Marxist-the government does not perform governing functions for *a* group, but for *all* groups. It registers the success or failure of group activities, and makes the necessary adjustments among the groups, dictated always by the actual balance of power among the groups. Bentley is clearly at a loss to explain how the government *knows* which groups are more or less powerful than others. Generally, he says, the government of a democratic nation is forced to make adjustments for large but weak interests (i.e., the mass of men) at the expense of small but intense interests (i.e., pressure groups). This, and this alone, is what "control by the people" means. But sometimes the government is forced to act as "the representative of the `absent' or quiescent group interests," and in this capacity it is sometimes thwarted from expressing those interests by the power of small groups *(Process,* 453-454) .

This makes the entire interest theory difficult to understand, because earlier Bentley had insisted that there can be *no* interest without activity. Thus, there can be no "absent or quiescent group interests": there are only weak interests and strong interests, and government, as the agency whose purpose it is to register the balance of power, has no business preferring weak interests to strong ones.

Interest expresses itself through government in the form of law, administrative decisions, executive actions and court rulings. Each of these activities is an expression of an underlying group interest. The sum total of these activities-the total work of government-is the existing balance of power in the society. That is, it is the balance among the contending groups, expressed as public policy.

> Each law . .` is a habitual activity, maintaining itself through organized government, and resting in a great bed of such activities. . . . We shall . . . find that our fullest and richest statement of the law is in terms of the group activity tending to spread itself *(Process,* 288, 292).

Law is thus another word for "habitual social activity . . . either

formulated, or enforced, and most commonly both . . . through a differentiated governing body." Since law is just another phase of group activity, it makes little sense to classify governments or legal systems on the basis of majority or minority rule. Such forms of rule are only "bits of technique" *(Process,* 274-283). The fact that law is coercive does not distinguish it from other forms of group activity. Only from a "very limited view-point" can we distinguish the state's power to punish from the group's own sanctions. "Voluntary and involuntary are artificial distinctions."

The general rule here is quite clear. There is simply no important difference between a nation and a group. "The state and minor groupings need to be assimilated to one another, rather than sharply contrasted." All political phenomena are on the same continuum. All political manifestations are one form or another of the basic social formula, which by this point in *The Process of Government* has grown rather long: masses of men/groups/interest/opinion/government/political/process/law. All are the same, "only stated from a different angle" (Process, 282).

The president, the Congress, and the courts all express those interests which are "big and strong enough to win out." Strength and size are the only requirements for getting expressed. Congress exists because groups have found talking to be a great improvement over conflict (violent conflict, that is) as a way of adjusting their interests. But beneath the argument lies strength." That is, beneath the rhetoric lie the familiar tools of group struggle: pressure and force masked behind a facade of argument and ideals. But Congress expresses *certain kinds of interests* more readily than others, and Bentley does not see how this observation contradicts his hope of demonstrating the automatic equation of policy and group interests. The peculiarity here, according to Bentley, is that Congress formally represents "locality groupings," whereas "occupational groupings" and "self-protection" (i.e., pressure groups) are in reality the most important interests represented in Congress. "In a condition of this kind the control of the representatives by the voters is usually weak." Also, log-rolling becomes the "most characteristic legislative process *(Process,* 360-371). Furthermore, the pace at which legislative bodies operate also interferes with the automatic group/government equation *(Process,* 398).

Something else interferes with the equation, something perilously close to being what Bentley would, in another mood, have termed a "spook." This is the "habit background" or "rules of the game"

which interpose themselves (he did not phrase it this way, but this is what it amounts to) between the participants in the group struggle in the legislature.

> There are limits to the technique of the struggle, this involving also limits to the group demands. . . . Or, in other words, when the struggle proceeds too harshly at any point there will become insistent in the society a group more powerful than either of those involved which tends to suppress the extreme and annoying methods of the group in the primary struggle *(Process,* 372).

This "habit background" must not be confused with a nascent *public* interest, since it is merely procedural and only brings the group struggle back within manageable limits.[35] Nor is the "group more powerful than either of those involved" the public itself, or even, necessarily, the government. In fact, it is unclear from the text what or who this strange group is, which leads us to believe that it is only a chimera, an inconsistent element in the theory of a *deus ex machina* which prevents the system (and the theory) from self-destructing. If the group struggle is the society, then there should be no mysterious force to mediate *between* the group struggle and society. But Bentley needs such a force, because in fact there is no automatic equation between public policy and group demands.

One way of resolving this contradiction would be to posit an institutional government interest and ascribe to that any inexplicable public policy which does not exactly match group demands. This far Bentley does not go, and it is difficult to see how he could. For that would require a demonstration that the policy put forward by government (conceived now as a separate, narrow interest group) bears some relation to its (narrow) group interest, when in fact the policies supported by government are much too varied, and much too broad, to admit of any such demonstration.

Bentley pursues the group/government equation into the courts. In law, he says, "the reasonings are of the process, not its directors." In order to understand the Supreme Court, we must

> get the cases and the theories and the precedents and the people all stated in one common set of pressures, every factor in terms of the others with exact reference to what it represented in the others, and what perhaps the others represented in it *(Process,* 382, 389).

35. On Bentley's failure to distinguish a public interest or common good, see Leo Weinstein, "The Group Approach," in Storing, ed., Essays, 197-205.

Here too the equation is relentless. Nothing that has ever been done or that might have been done could have altered the simple equation of group pressures and government policy. If Chief Justice Marshall had made different decisions during his tenure, the interests expressed in the decisions he did make would simply have expressed themselves elsewhere. "The power was not in Marshall, but in the interest groups he so adequately recognized and allowed to come so smoothly and speedily *to their due dominance in the government" (Process,* 390. My emphasis).

The Darwinian assumptions are clear. What is, had to be. Strong groups should be represented; the groups that are represented are by definition the strong groups. Everything works out for the best. "Order is now, and order has been, where order is needed...." If the interests had been different from the ones aided by Marshall's decisions (and Bentley does not speculate on what those interests were), then those other groups would have prevailed "by the power of the underlying interests which pump all the logic into theory that theory obtains." The justices, "far from being a sort of legal machine ... are a functioning part of this government, reponsive to the group pressures within it, representative of all sorts of pressures, and using their representative judgement to bring these pressures to *balance (Process,* 390, 393. My emphasis).

It is this attitude that has led Myron Q. Hale to accuse Bentley of providing a "surreptitious sanctification of the actual." It is a valid point, and is no less so because Bentley may have intended something quite different. Whatever his intention, however, his conclusion cannot be avoided. A group's interests are "expressed" by law because the group is strong. It is not strong *because* its interests are expressed. Nor can the statesman choose which interests are to be expressed through law (i.e., what goals it will pursue)-that would require the introduction of a "spook," a political motive from outside the group struggle. Instead, Bentley sees the political order awaiting the decision of the process as to which group will succeed and which will go under. "The reasonings are of the process. "[3B]

36. **Myron** Q. **Hale, "The Cosmology** of **Arthur** F. **Bentley,"** in ***The Bias of*** *Pluralism,* ed. William E. Connolly (New York: Atherton Press, 1969), 35. Hale links Bentley to Darwin; but Bentley's relationship to *Social* Darwinism is complex. As we will see below, Bentley was not a political conservative, whatever the implications of his "cosmology." He worked for LaFollette's presidential campaign in Indiana and supported the Non-Partisan League. But neither was he a part of the movement that Eric Goldman has called "reform Darwinism," whose adherents looked to the corn-

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With the analysis of the courts, Bentley's survey of the process of government came to an end. What are we left with? Since Bentley thought he was giving us a tool useful in the study of politics, it may be helpful to see what use he made of it himself. Does the process concept help us understand political things? In particular, does it help us understand the political crisis that (as we shall see) was part of the motivation for Bentley's work? Did it help Bentley?

It did not. The weakest sections of *The Process of Government* are Bentley's attempts to "explain" political phenomena. There are three controversies in particular which clearly demonstrate Bentley's helplessness in the face of political events: 1) The passage of the federal meat inspection act under Theodore Roosevelt's administration; 2) the tariff reform controversy of the same period; and 3) the agitation in Chicago for the regulation of truck loads. In each case, the process tool fails to explain (or even to describe) political reality.

Since Bentley's theory posits a unity of government and the process of group interaction-he has said repeatedly that they are the same thing-he must show that public policy can be explained as a consequence of group activity. If these phenomena ever become separated, the suspicion will be aroused that they are fundamentally different, and not simply phases of one another. So it is important for Bentley to show that interests are always expressed through government policy *if* they are strong enough to be expressed at all. "If group interests tend in a certain direction, and are checked in their course through Congress, they will find their way through the presidency."

His use of the meat inspection controversy is revealing. Bills calling for the inspection of meat, which had the support of the Secretary of Agriculture, were bottled up in Congress by representatives sympathetic to the packing industry. Taking advantage of the sudden controversy caused by Upton Sinclair's expose, *The Jungle,* President Roosevelt

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petition of social groups to "evolve" the present system and its evils out of existence. See Eric Goldman, *Rendezvous with Destiny* (New York: Vintage Books, 1956), 70-81. Bentley, in *The Process of Government* at least, denied the theory of progress, and so would have been forced to deny also the teleological implications of both conservative *and* reform Darwinism. He apparently believed in a purely amoral version of Darwin: change through the interaction of organism and environment, with survival of the fittest (not the best) social groups.

> used his chance, proved on the spot that his judgment of the interest grouping of the population was correct, bullied the congressional representatives of the beef industry until they surrendered.... The president was the legislative organ, through which *the great group interest* functioned in this case *(Process, 351.* **Emphasis his).**

There are several interesting points about this example which suggest the confusion surrounding Bentley's notion of interest and government, and their relation to process. He wants the government/group equation to be automatic, yet he is faced with an interest-meat inspection-which was not getting expressed. Nor can he argue that the president took up the expression of interests that were too weak to be expressed through Congress, for that would *introduce* a spook in the form of an agent from outside the group process. So he must argue the improbable-that the meat inspection interest achieved the requisite strength at just the moment President Roosevelt made himself available for its expression. Presumably, if the president had not been sympathetic to the regulation of trusts, the meat inspection interest would have expressed itself through the only remaining agency of group demands: the Supreme Court (surely an improbal?le result, given the views of the court's majority).

And what is the "great group interest" which functioned through the president? Calling it "great" seems to upgrade its status somewhat. Was it great because it was large? This is hard to believe, since "clean meat" had only recently become an issue and few Americans had been conscious of it before reading or hearing about *The Jungle.* Was it great because it was general, in the sense that it applied to a wide variety of people with little else in common? This is a possibility, and yet without taking a survey to discover who among the population was expressing an active desire for clean meat, it would be impossible for Bentley to know.

Nor is this the only quandary. For there was an interest which *did* express itself through activity *of* various kinds, but which nevertheless "got lost in. the process" (sometimes literally). This was the packinghouse workers' interest in better working conditions, the cause which *The Jungle* was meant to support. "I aimed at the public's heart," Sinclair wrote later, "but by accident I hit its stomach instead."

Earlier Bentley notes that one of the characteristics of a primitive society is that "at no stage is the structure able to misrepresent large elements in the society or to block the activity" *(Process, 332).* This

would apparently suggest that in *less* primitive societies it is possible for large interests to be misrepresented. (We have just seen how a relatively small interest can be misrepresented, or even ignored.) But this admission is taken back almost immediately in the discussion of how group interests work through the executive, where Bentley, in discussing the tariff reform, tries to show once again that this process is automatic. Where an interest does not express itself through the executive, the reason is simple. It is not yet strong enough. Despite his known sympathy for tariff reform, Bentley argues, Theodore Roosevelt was unable to achieve any significant reform because the "tariff reform interest" was not strong enough. But this hindrance is only temporary. In a few years, the tariff reform group will express itself in "more emphatic form" and will carry the day *(Process,* 347).

But of course this is not an explanation of anything. It is simply a restatement of the fact that tariff reformers were beaten by their opponents. A true explanation of this fact would require an analysis of several factors: the state of public opinion and the obstacles in the way of its expression; the division among tariff reformers themselves; the power of small but intense interests and the weakness of large but diffuse ones; the influence of the parties; the control of the press; the traditional hostility of the south to pro-northern tariffs; and so on. Any one of these factors would suggest, however, that American political institutions did not simply transfer the wishes of a majority into public policy. What Bentley wishes to be simple and automatic would be revealed to be complex and deliberate.

When Bentley sensed the existence of a wide, public interest that was being thwarted by pressure groups, he was able to convince himself that process would win out in the end. Such was the case with the regulation of truck loads in Chicago. Here was an example of a general interest-the upkeep of the city streets-shared by all citizens (or, as Bentley calls them, taxpayers) but stifled by the power of the trucking industry, whose overloaded vehicles were destroying the city's payments; The demand for regulation, Bentley is convinced, is bound to succeed sooner or later, "because it genuninely represents the mass of indifferent taxpayers, even those who do not join organizations in support of that demand. Joiners or no, all taxpayers are "potentially comprised in the group activity. There is a tendency to action among them. *If sufficiently goaded they will come to `know' their own interests" (Process,* 231-236. My emphasis).

This is the same morass in which David Truman foundered forty years later in *The Governmental Process.* Bentley's problem is the same as Truman's, and Truman borrowed Bentley's solution. The obvious fact that the "group process" does not represent all interests-even widely shared ones-is to be explained away by positing the existence of "potential" interest groups. As Bentley suggests, however, these "potential" interests are of a special type: they are the wide, diffuse, general interests that so often go unexpressed for lack of a small but efficient group to embody them, for example, the upkeep of the streets, the construction of a sound tariff policy, the working conditions in industrial plants (as contrasted, for example, with the upkeep of a particular street, the tariff on a particular product, or working conditions in a single factory of a single industry). The group process ignores, by Bentley's own evidence, a tremendous variety of public needs. It is, in other words, not a universal phenomenon, not a synonym for "politics," but a particular *kind* of politics.

Had Bentley continued his political studies, perhaps these problems would have become clearer to him. But for various reasons he abandoned his search for a science of politics after writing *The Process of Government,* and devoted the remainder of his career to applying the process notion to other subject..-with one exception. This was a curious manuscript written in the early 1920s, some ten to twelve years after *The Process of Government,* but before *Relativity in Man and Society,* the major work of his middle years. This manuscript, *Makers, Users and Masters,* went unpublished until 1969, twelve years after Bentley's death. It reveals as clearly as does *The Process of Government* Bentley's failure as a political scientist and the limitations of the process tool in comprehending political reality.

Makers, Users and Masters is an impassioned denunciation of the drift and decay of American politics, written by a staunch Progressive, and addressed to a general audience. The contrast with *The Process of Government* could not be more striking. The author of *Process* was scornful of tradition, "objective," more excited by the correct "stating" of a problem than by its solution. In *Process,* politics was an epiphenomenon, a bodiless spook; in *Makers, Users and Masters it* is a vivid battleground on which the fate of the nation will be decided. But it would be a mistake to consider *Makers* an aberration, or to see this work as "opinion" and the rest of Bentley's work as "science." This is the same Bentley, but he is expressing, as

he might have put it, a different phase of himself. Bentley's method and his basic approach to political order have not changed; all that is unique about *Makers is* the problem it attempts to solve.

That is the great unsolved dilemma of *The Process of Government:* What is the basis of the state? What is it that holds the political order together, that makes it more than just a random assemblage of individuals? The answer implicit in *Process is* that the state has no basis at all, that the political order is simply a name we give to certain phases of the interest-group process-a mistaken name, at that. The process tool was fundamentally an attempt to see behind the "empty formalism" of government to the essential "stuff" of social life, but Bentley's insistence on dissolving the formal categories of political action left the edifice of the state with no foundation at all. Ideals meant nothing; laws were simply a reflection of the group struggle, valid to that extent and no farther; the rhetoric of politics could be studied only to discover the interests which it masked; even individuals were ephemeral, their actions merely the products of the overlapping group affiliations which the process tool was designed to reveal. The intent of *The Process of Government* was destructive. *Makers, Users, and Masters* had an opposite purpose, but now Bentley was faced with a serious problem. He could not reassemble the state without putting back some of the pieces he had discarded so quickly in his earlier work.

One of those pieces was citizenship. Man as citizen does not appear in *Process.* Like Beard, Bentley believed that "man as a political animal" was the flimsiest construct of all. Since the political dimension of life was only a reflection of a deeper reality, citizenship itself must be only a surface phenomenon. We never see the citizen, Bentley said in effect, but only the man as mirrored in the groups to which he belongs or with which he is identified. The functions of citizens, such as deliberation, are best understood as the result of the process of group interaction, and not as separate "acts" performed by separate "individuals." That is, they emerge out of the process of government automatically, without conscious volition on anyone's part.

But *Makers, Users and Masters* was concerned with the restoration of order to American politics, and for that task something more would be needed than the rule of process. Process, after all, would give us any old order at all. ("Order is now, and order has been....") But it was not *any* order that Bentley wished to restore, but a particular order: the Jeffersonian republic of small pro-

prietors, self-government, and free enterprise: The enemy of that republic was-the Trusts! It was the group process itself that Bentley intended to criticize in *Makers.* The same group process extolled *in* his earlier work now came under fire for delivering too much *power* to the "masters" and too little power to the "makers and users." And yet Bentley could neither give up the process tool nor reshape it for its new purpose. Consequently, he could not see which of the missing pieces was needed to complete the puzzle.

Using the group/process/interest scheme, Bentley attempted to analyze post-War American problems, and ran into trouble straight away. Announcing the subject of the book to be the "facts of wealth and power *in* the United States," Bentley declared his intentions to state these facts

> objectively . . . in terms of groups, of their interests as related to one another.... No observer or student of such facts can hope to convey a position outside of them from which he can judge them.... Whoever we are, whatever we *say* or do, *we* express some special phase of the process.... The content of our thought *is* the people and the interests of the people as manifested *in* the various groups with which we are more or less identified *(Makers, 2-3).*

So far this is familiar language. Society is simply the groups, and the group interests, which the analyst can describe by observing activity. But since Bentley *is* arguing for reform, he must have interests that would logically lead to *a* call for restoration. So he proceeds to do what he had abjured in *The Process of Government:* he assigns these interests to himself. Some *of* them are a middle-class appreciation *for* opportunities to work and for the leadership which affords these opportunities, and "very little sympathy for suffering. [I am] compelled to accept it as it is." (Nevertheless, Bentley helped to organize the Red Cross in Indiana, which shows how complicated interest can be.) He also dislikes "bartering and trafficking" but does enjoy "initiative and adventure" (more complexities still). He has a "prejudice for" civil liberties. He is a "representative of the interests of farmers and investors" (he was running an apple orchard at the time) . And then the paradox: "Even more characteristically he [that is, Bentley] would seem representative of the interests of consumers-those vital and broad interests, vaguely formulated, subordinated by most people to their more clearly defined interests as producers" *(Makers, 3-5).*

Bentley admits that this is not the typical middle-class viewpoint, but this admission makes the interest theory difficult to maintain.

Because if Bentley has a different attitude than the "people and groups with which he identifies" then the link between group and *attitude* has been broken. Likewise, if he is conscious of "vital and broad interests" with which his fellow citizens in the middle class are unfamiliar, then the link between group and *interest* has been broken as well.

What necessitates this crucial lapse in the process theory is Bentley's intention to speak as a citizen rather than as a scientist. His view in *Makers,* despite protestations to the contrary, is not "objective" at all, but polemical. In a way he did not understand, he fulfilled his own dictum that "no observer , can hope to occupy a position outside of" the structure of interests, but the interests involved here are ones for which Bentley has no word. They are, as he put it, "those vital and broad interests, vaguely formulated," which classical thought would have identified as the citizen's interest. But since Bentley has already dispensed with citizenship, along with the rest of the "soul stuff" of politics, he is forced to come up with a new term to substitute for it. What political theorists had traditionally called the citizen's interest, Bentley calls "the interests of consumers."

To my knowledge, Arthur Bentley is the first American writer to use "consumer" as a synonym for "citizen," a shift in usage of tremendous import, and one which has become quite common in recent years.[37] What this new definition of citizenship suggests most forcefully is this: as the political order faded from Bentley's view, the economic order grew more vivid, so that the role of consumer could naturally arise to take the place once held by the citizen. If the public could not be a "group" with an "interest," surely the mass of consumers could take the public's place, since "consumer" is a category which logically must include everyone. Furthermore, the consumer's interest bears a family resemblance to the interests Bentley was most aware of: the quantifiable, specific, economic interests of the pressure-group system.

For obvious reasons, the economic order in which consumers are forced to operate is a poor replacement for the political order which Bentley had banished from his theory. Consumers typically make their decisions on the basis of private need and economic necessity, not on the basis of their "vital and broad interests." Economic

37. Ralph Nader, more than any other contemporary writer, has popularized this use of the word "consumer."

theory even requires them to behave in this way. Strictly economic reasoning would persuade a consumer to "purchase" private solutions to various problems. To borrow Bentley's examples from *The Process of Government,* economic reasoning would persuade a consumer to buy clean meat, even at inflated prices; to worry only about the tariffs on goods with which he is involved (cotton in the South, machine goods in the North); or to secure zoning ordinances which keep overloaded trucks out of his own neighborhood. Political reasoning-which is what Bentley clearly has in mind in *Makers-would* seek more general solutions to these problems. In fact, Bentley himself, the Red Cross organizer who professes no sympathy for suffering, is a perfect example of the contradictions to which his own theories lead.

Using the economic order as a pattern, Bentley proceeds with his reconstruction of American society. In doing so, however, he returns to the focus on groups which marked *The Process of Government.* But in *Makers, Users and Masters* there is a difference: the groups are now part of a recognizable moral universe and are even ranked according to a scale of values. Some groups belong in the system because they conform to the pattern with which Bentley is working. Other groups are alien to that pattern and disruptive of sound order. Large organizational structures, Bentley believes, have upset a preexisting democratic equilibrium characterized by small business, subsistence farming, and independent artisans. The cure for this domination by powerful interests is the creation of more groups to offset them, a process which should be aided, where necessary, by government. Here, as in *The Process of Government,* the state appears as both a registrar of group interests *and* as a guarantor of equilibrium-a contradictory set of responsibilities which Bentley is never able to reconcile.

There is nothing startling about Bentley's sense of the lost order of American politics. It is the familiar liberal vision of a nation of rugged but well-behaved individualists. In this dream, government has little to do but guard the "highways" of trade and communication, keeping them open to the enterprise of honest men. Bentley asks his readers to rebuild the country according to this pattern:

> ... a nation with a functioning representative government, its citizens showing some practical participation in its control, its workers having ... opportunity to direct or control or own some individualized part of its industry; a society of laissez faire, of competition and the benefits of competition, and of individual

> freedom. Such a society as we had, or assumed we had, or at least assumed we were building, through almost the whole course of the nineteenth century *(Makers,* 185).

The despoiler of this idyll is the industrial revolution-specifically, the concentration of power over the once-open highways of life. Today, Bentley says, "wealth is not so much substantial property to use and enjoy, as it is the powerful assertion of claims upon the future income of the people." These claims constitute a highly organized "industrial government." And although the industrial government get its formal right to exist from the political government, essentially it created itself and is a co-sovereign with the state *(Makers,* 31, 40).

The difference between the industrial government and more conventional, old-fashioned economic activity is the difference between "profiteering" and "profit." The distinction is more than one of degree. Profiteering tends to "perpetuate itself," while "profits, on the other hand, . have a tendency to disappear" *(Makers, 60).* That is, once the new invention or method that was the source of a profit has become widely imitated, the profit becomes widely distributed. Profit is caused by efficiency, innovation, or luck: profiteering is based on the dominance by one form over an entire market, with or without the sanction of law.

> Assume profits, in the old way, as that part of the product which a man gets for his special ability, skill, or luck in managing his enterprise, and we have something of a rent while it lasts; modified by a tendency to wipe it out with the free spread of knowledge and training. [But with] progressing industrial organization we have elements, not merely of efficiency in service, but of prestige, good will, of control of a market or of a series of markets; and finally, of control of output and prices, subject to such modifications as self-limitation of wants and needs by consumers may give *(Makers, 65).*

Profiteering (and Bentley includes strike-enforced wages under this heading) is a result of position, monopoly, organization.

> when many great adventurers mass together and perpetuate their requirements of reward, then the payment which society must make becomes enormous in its total. There was a time when the great adventurers were, in the end . . . mastered by the industrial process in which they were a part. But now there has come a time when they have banded themselves together to master that process itself *(Makers, 68).*

As a result, "the little profits of man with man disappear; the little freedoms of man in trade with man disappear. The great profiteer-

ing, the autocratic control of centralized industry, takes their place" *(Makers, 97).*

Nothing is quite so revealing of a man's inner thought and motivations as the things which make him angry. We can see very clearly here what motivates the considerable passion of *Makers, Users, and Masters.* There was once an order to American life; that order has been lost, and must be restored. The fundamental characteristic of that order was its natural harmony, *a harmony guaranteed by the automatic rule of social process.* ("There was a time when the great adventurers were mastered . . . by the industrial process . . . ") Society governed itself without the need for political arts, political judgement, or political intervention. Bentley now calls for a reassertion of that sovereignty of process: "When such situations arise, and they are always arising, always being forced upon us as new masters appear in new positions, *it* is *for society to deal with them" (Makers,* 101. My emphasis). The masters of process must be overthrown by the social groups whose relations *are* the process of government. The role of government, however, is contradictory. Whereas in *The Process of Government* it appeared primarily as a registrar of interests-all interests, even those of the "masters"-here it appears as an active participant in the reinvestment of process *and* as a harmonizer of interests *(Makers,* 255, n. *7).* These two roles can only be seen as complementary if process is seen *as* the font of *a* natural social harmony. Otherwise, the performance of one task might interfere with the performance of the other.

Process, moreover, is the agent of its own investiture. Like a bastard prince, it crowns itself. No specific group will end the domination of the masters: all the legitimate groups banded together will perform that task. It is "the nation at work, . . . the mass of men with tools in their hands" that will form the cadres of the "counter-revolution" against the industrial government. "We are, all of *us,* makers and users . . . the real thing, the fundamental fact, is the man with the tool." Bentley is not talking about the working class here. He is scornful of such groups as the American Federation of Labor, and does not look to them to lead the fight against the masters. Labor unions are themselves masters. They divorce the worker from, and set his interests against, the industrial process itself. The working man who belongs to a union "regards himself as a man out to get something, not as a man with a tool in his hand out to produce something" *(Makers,* 181, 101).

The one group to whom Bentley does look for a special leadership

role in this battle is the middle class-"the middle classes, illuminated as to where they themselves stand, as to how their own interests are at stake. Far as it is from a certainty that they will so act, there is just as certainly a hope" *(Makers, 185).* Although the American middle class is "the most ignorant . . . in the world" because of its manipulation by the pro-business press, it nevertheless possesses one outstanding characteristic. As the rightful inheritors of the American political tradition, the members of the middle class have no interest in dominating the natural processes of social life, only in bringing them back through a "restorative intervention." Bentley's image of the middle class suggests a teeming mass of social interaction awaiting release from their fetters, a natural balance, poised to happen:

> The middle-class man is the man working in the world with his tools in his hand, playing the game with his fellows, adventuring his full within the rules of the game, taking his ups and downs as skill and chance may give; but always a member of the great organization of makers and users, with some approach to sureness and safety and equality as a man among men ... The essential fact about the middle-class man, for the polical purposes of the immediate future, is that his interests as a consumer have become superior to his interests as a producer or appropriator *(Makers, 190).*

Bentley always had a fascination for economics. That was his intended field of study when he enrolled at Johns Hopkins, and he said late in his career that he wanted to write a book about economics but could not find enough data, and so wrote *The Process of Government* instead. That early fascination is evident in both *Process* and *Makers.* The models and metaphors of both works are derived from classical economic theory, with its focus on the transactions between economic "units," the objectivity of its method, its search for the hidden springs of social behavior and "laws" to explain them. Bentley has simply substituted this model for the political order, and tried to make it perform the requisite duties.

But the economic metaphor would not bear the weight placed upon it, and Bentley was forced repeatedly to conjure the "spooks" of politics for assistance. Whereas in *Process* the Constitution was defined in good process language as simply "the actual working everyday organization of our political society," it is now made of sterner stuff. The "privileges and immunities of citizens of the United States," Bentley wrote in *Makers,* are no "mere matters of verbiage, no sop to the theorists, but hard-won possessions, the heritage of centuries of struggle," which must be protected against

the attacks of the industrial masters. The power of corporations is not just a fact to be reckoned with unsentimentally, but a usurpation of a "public right." The government is no longer simply a registrar of group demands, but a champion of the public interest. *(Process,* 55; *Makers,* 111, 194-206, *209)*.

Bentley's call to battle against the trusts could only be answered by citizens, and yet Bentley's world was populated only by groups of consumers and producers whose lives were defined by their interests as units of an economic order, not by their interests as citizens of a republic. A "restoration" such as Bentley envisioned in *Makers was* in reality a thorough-going revolution against the entire course of American social and economic development from the beginning of the nineteenth century. Such a revolution could not possibly be carried out within the structure of interests which that same development had created. The world of small business, subsistence farming, and independent artisans *was a* far cry from the world of giant corporations and nationalized commerce that Bentley inveighed against, and yet he could not bring himself to see how much of that old world had simply passed away. (Perhaps because his own apple orchard was precisely the kind of small, local enterprise which *was* able to survive the transition to commercial agriculture and national markets.) In this respect, as in others, Bentley was typical of the Progressive movement. He managed to combine a deep anxiety over the direction of American "drift" with a remarkable optimism about the ease of reversing that direction. But he was most like the progressives in his belief that the undirected and unregulated competition of social groups would provide the surest and most "American" way of restoring the nation to its original pattern. It was man as group member, as maker and user and consumer, who would be the hero of Bentley's counter-revolution-and not man as citizen.

"... a sea of words"

Makers, Users, and Masters was Bentley's last foray into the world of politics. His next major work, *Relativity in Man and Society,* launched a new career in the "sociology of language" that would occupy him for the rest of his life.[38] Most of Bentley's later work is dif-

38. Besides journal articles, the other major works from this period are *Behavior Knowledge Fact* (Bloomington, Ind.: The Principia Press, 1935), and, with John Dewey, *Knowing and the Known* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1949). Bentley's essays have been collected by Sidney Ratner and published as ***Inquiry into Inquiries: Essays in Social Theory*** **(Boston: Beacon Press, 1954).**

ficult, but there are several points about it which should be emphasized, for they confirm and clarify some of the political implications of Bentley's earlier writings."

Language, Bentley wrote in *The Process of Government, "is* a sea of words in which political movements swim." This intriguing metaphor, which Bentley intends to suggest the evanescent quality of political language, is an early statement of the ruling preoccupation of his later career. Bentley was convinced that the conventional treatments of political rhetoric were hopelessly naive. Not only did the conventional methods take political rhetoric at face value (an utterly worthless approach, according to him) they also failed to identify the most important fact about language in general, which is that language is a process, like all activity. It can therefore only be studied through use of the process tool.

What Bentley meant by this is that a conversation between two people cannot be understood if we take the conventional view and assume that two isolated individuals are exchanging "things" called "words." The reality of language, as with all activity, lies in process, i.e., in a way of seeing which included the "things," the space "between" them, and whatever transpires within that space. Meaning is derived not from action, but from what Bentley eventually decided to call "trans-action."[40]

There can therefore be no reason for postulating a distinction between the individual and the environment. Both are part of one procedural, transactional unity. The term "consciousness," for example, is conventionally understood in psychology as a relation "between a living organism and its world." But this simple statement of a familiar concept is unacceptable to Bentley, because it keeps

> the organism and the world separate, posits a relation, and places this in a series of relations .. And yet, no matter how we crystallize each of them, the one most probable remark about consciousness is that it is that aspect of experience in which there is a comprehensiveness of organism and world and relationship *(Relativity, 75-76).*

Our conventional use and understanding of words is thus incapable of expressing process. The reality of the world is flux; the basis of language is definition. Where the world is seen as unbound-

39. For a more detailed examination of Bentley's later work, see Kress, *Social Science* 130-212.

40. Kress, *Social Science,* 148; Bentley, *Behavior 70-77.*

ed activity, language separates and divides what is inseparable and indivisible. Until language finds a way of expressing the reality of process, science will be necessarily a primitive and misleading endeavor *(Behavior, v)*.

This notion is clearly an extension of the much simpler "group process" concept of *The Process of Government.* In that work Bentley dissolved the traditional categories of action, particularly the political categories. Now he has embarked on the dissolution of language itself. But his purpose is the same. All of Bentley's work is animated by the search for a way of stating social reality ("the sociological ultimate") that would encompass everything at once. For that purpose it was necessary to break down first the boundaries between politics, economics, and society; later, as Bentley became more ambitious, it was necessary to break down the boundaries between the individual and the environment in which he (it?) operated.[41]

It was also necessary to break down the boundaries between time and space. Bentley's reading of Einstein's work in theoretical physics convinced him that man's "most stable words, space and time, have crumbled under his hands . . . . How much more will the same probably prove to be true with the vague and passing words which he used to denote his relations in his societies?" *(Relativity,* 16-25). The idea of relativity pushed Bentley farther and farther down the road in his search for the "sociological ultimate." The next stop on that journey was "the conversational remark," which Bentley offered in the 1920s as a likely candidate for the "basic unit of investigation." For if we cannot understand the conversational remark, bringing to our understanding the process of its expression, and its meaning as extended in space and time, how can we hope to understand anything? But the obstacles to this seemingly primitive beginning were vast. Foremost among these obstacles was

> the habit of attributing the most significant phase of the event to `man as actor' and . . . setting off to one side all that part of the event which is not adequately expressed in individualized reference, and treating it as `abstract' existence or as 'history' *(Behavior, 208)*.

41. This required some tricky grammar. In *The Process of Government,* activity was described as "men doing something." But as Bentley's world became increasingly formless under the assaults of the process tool, activity become "something being done." The passive tense is necessary because the individual-the "man doing something"-has been dissolved along with everything else. All that is left is the pure activity, like the smile on the Cheshire cat.

If two people are having a conversation about a presidential election (although the subject of the conversation is irrelevant to the point he is making), traditional analysis would assume that there are: 1) two distinct individuals who are 2) using a common language to 3) discuss an event external to themselves which 4) has a separate history. Bentley would insist that we get rid of all these divisions, between the individuals and their environment, between all these "things" and the history of which they are assumed to be "parts." We have instead *one process* without separate "parts." The meaning lies in the total interaction which is the conversational remark.

This is obviously a difficult method-difficult to understand, let alone use. Bentley had considerable difficulty with it himself, especially with those aspects of process summed up by the words "time" and "space." *Relativity in Man and Society* was written to clarify this special problem, but each time Bentley widened the process concept, he sank deeper into the mire.

For example: in *Relativity* Bentley used the Volstead (Prohibition) Act to demonstrate how "considerations of duration in time and space" should be worked into the analysis of a "social fact." In order to study such a fact, we must subsume everything about it under the heading of "activity . however variously that activity may be analyzed." Most importantly, however, the analysis must not be arbitrarily limited as to time and space.

> We can combine in one field all of Western Europe with the United States, requiring for that an extension of duration into the near future. We may or may not find a possibility of extension across the Russian field, and still more remotely across the Mohammedan field. We will watch the contacts with other activities across government controls and through opinion and discussion *(Relativity,* 100).

We must be careful to analyze everything: the law itself, the documents in which it is written, the debates, the lobbying, the medical reports and drinking, the social customs of drinkers and non-drinkers, the enforcement, the law-breaking, the system of industry and trade which produces alcohol, the foreign events which effect it *(Relativity,* 100). Extending in space in an ever-widening circle, and backward and forward in time, a process analysis of prohibition might turn into the kernel of a Hegelian Universal History-there is at any rate nothing in the method that can tell us when to stop collecting and analyzing data. We might well go on forever, like a rogue computer trying to resolve the value of *pi.*

Relentless as he was, Bentley eventually was forced to the conclusion that the individual analyst too must be dissolved in the solvent of process. In *Behavior Knowledge Fact* he even dissolved himself:

> Consider the 'act' in which I am now engaged. I have here a typewriter, a copy of *Psychologies of 1930,* and sundry memoranda made in the course of the last few months. On a table near by are copies of several books written by Dewey. An 'act' is in progress; namely the writing of this paragraph. This 'act' certainly implicates-and in its wider spatial-temporal envisionment directly involves-all the items I have mentioned, as well as my fingers and body and the rest of 'me' and long histories of all these phenomena. It is certainly 'trans-action,' and it certainly involves 'experiencing.' Certain 'parts' of it also can be taken out and inspected as 'life-career'-if that happens to be worth while ... . If we want to study this bit of 'what is happening' with any thoroughness at all, *we shall have to deal with it elaborately in a frame of wider happenings across* ***thousands*** *of years and thousands of miles-a frame wherein it secures a significance vastly greater than that of 'life-career,' though perhaps not so currently interesting (Behavior,* 80-81. My emphasis).

This is the "trans-actional" method for which Bentley had been groping all along. There are several curious features about it, but perhaps the most curious is its relation to the "individualism" for which Bentley had such contempt. At first glance, of course, it seems the very antithesis of individualism. What could be less individualistic than this furious self-dissolution into disembodied "fingers and body and the rest of `me' "? However, Bentley has not only dissolved himself; he had dissolved everything, and everyone, else as well, as can be seen in this remarkable passage from "New Ways and Old to Talk About Men," published in 1929:

> Jack, the anatomical organism, is the out-growth of germ cells from parents and uncounted ancestors; better said, *he* is *the present durational aspect of the age-long history of those cells:* he contains within himself germs of countless descendants, due to appear as aspects of the same history in later generations. Jack, the physiological organism, has sunlight and star-rays in his very being, the very explosion of atoms on the sun is working in him always.'[$]

To dissolve the entire universe from the beginning to the end of time into one undifferentiated flux is an individualism of an unpleasantly maniacal sort, like that of the character in the Chesterton story who

42. Arthur Bentley, "New Ways and Old to Talk About Men," reprinted in Ratner, ed., *Inquiry,* **37-52,** at 51. My emphasis. Originally published in ***The Sociological Review*** **21** (1929): 300.

convinces himself that the streams of rain running down the window glass are moving inresponse to his silent commands.[43]

This thought brings us back to the metaphor with which this section began, and now we can understand why that metaphor is so ambiguous. As Bentley suggest, the "sea of words" is the proper environment-the natural environment-of politics. But this fact gives to language a role and an importance that Bentley intended the metaphor to deny. Far from being evanescent, language is to politics what the sea is to the creatures that swim in it: The atmosphere which shapes it and gives it life.[44] But what has happened to that language under the impress of the process concept? To complete Bentley's figure of speech, the sea itself has dissolved, and the creatures who once lived in it are left to perish in an alien environment.

Bentley sensed these wider implications of his assault on the language, and he was fully prepared to accept-and to generalize-them. The intellectual fraternity, he felt, would either learn to talk in terms of process, or it would fail to found a true science of society. Only in that certain intermediate stage in time and place which is occupied by the man in the street ... will the cosmos insist on being solid and substantial Fact" *(Behavior,* 172). But even the ordinary citizen would have to accept the dissolution of his world and learn to see it as boundless, meaningless activity.

> John Doe will strongly object to the substitution of any 'postulate' in place of his 'real' world. He is confident he himself can provide a backbone of security for such a real world .... His view is that small prim, assertive, and tenacious view embodied in our practical everyday language . . . . 'Man,' says John Doe, in effect, 'is the measure of all things,' but he says it in sharp assumption that not only the 'man' and the `things,' but above all the 'measuring' procedures, are within his personal and immediate competence and knowledge *(Behavior,* 172, n. 4).

43. G. K. Chesterton, "The Crime of Gabriel Gale," in *The Man Who Was Chesterton,* ed. Raymond T. Bond (New York: Dodd, Mead, and Co., 1954), 501-522. Chesterton devised an exquisite cure for this particular form of monomania: his poet-hero, Gale, ties the victim to a tree and sticks the two prongs of a hay-fork on either side of his neck, leaving him to struggle with material reality and discover for himself that matter (himself included) has boundaries and limitations.

44. For this insight, and others, I am indebted to my teacher, Wilson Carey McWilliams.

Rather than offer the confused citizen some assurance that there might somewhere be an order to events and a language capable of expressing that order, Bentley offered this somber news instead:

> The difficulty now is that John Doe must cease to be absolute, cease even to keep a small consolatory fragment of absoluteness in reserve, and must yield himself to be just one `local' in a world of locals.' Driven from one defense after another, there comes a time when there is nothing left for him except to be sullen, and that is exactly the mood in which we are apt to find him; and it is only because of this mood, *and because of its assertive interference with the analysis we are forced to make,* that I take him into account here at all *(Behavior,* 172).

This is a truly extraordinary claim. Bentley has taken the final step here and simply eliminated humanity from the analysis of human societies: the final dissolution. Man is no longer even the *subject* of study, but only an interference with it. And just as process has become the subject of Bentley's science, it has also replaced man as the source of values. Bentley's appeal to later generations of political science may lie here: he was one of the first American social scientists to make the claim that society could be studied with the same detached motivation with which the natural scientist approached the study of molecules, atoms, and chemicals. Bentley seemed to be saying something like this: If we concentrate on the process of social interaction, we need not concern ourselves with the meaning of that interaction. "We observe what we observe, and that is all there is to it, except as we analyze it." And since we cannot observe meaning, we cannot discuss it.

What this view meant to political science can be seen in the confused pages of *Makers, Users, and Masters.* When Bentley needed a voice that could articulate political meanings, he found himself struck speechless by his reliance on the process tool. "Beyond activity," he had said, "there is nothing." But it was in that realm of "nothing" that he searched for the answers to the problems confronting America in the 1920s. Yet he scarcely knew the words to describe what he was looking for.

Other, less ambitious writers have wondered about the reality of the public order, without accepting (or even being aware of) the larger implication of Bentley's metaphysic. Some have accepted the idea that the "citizen" is an abstraction too ephemeral for the purposes of social science. Others have denied that the "public" can have an interest tangible or clear enough to be known in any scien-

tific sense. Others have allowed "political man" to be swallowed by "economic man" and have replaced the polity with the marketplace. Other schools see politics as a mere reflection of "deeper" or more "fundamental" relationships and forces. And all such schools face the same difficulty Bentley faced: the impossibility of explaining politics with nonpolitical categories of analysis. [45]

Bentley returned to this theme in one of his last articles, "Kennetic Inquiry," published in 1950. [46] As a sign of how serious he was in his insistence on the abolition of meaning, he quoted with approval Percy Bridgman's attack on Einstein. Einstein, Bridgman asserted, had failed to draw the proper implications of his own discoveries, and insisted on searching for "Absolute meaning" somewhere in the cosmos. "Einstein believes it possible to . . sublimate . . . the point of view of the individual observer into something universal, `public,' and `real.' " [47] Nothing could better describe the enemy Bentley labored a lifetime to overcome. The universal, the public, and the real: process theory would abolish them all. And to a surprising extent, American political science would embrace Bentley's cause, with important consequences for the language of political inquiry.

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45. Representative texts include Charles Beard, *Politics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1908); Truman, *The Governmental Process;* Pendleton Herring, *The Politics of Democracy* (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 1940); Anthony Downs, *An Economic Theory of Democracy* (New York: Harper and Bros., 1957); Seymour Martin Upset, *Political Man* (New York: Doubleday and Co., 1960). For different views on the public as a category of analysis, see Bertrand de Jouvenel, *The Pure Theory of Politics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983) and *Sovereignty: An Inquiry into the Political Good* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963); and Sheldon Wolin, *Politics and Vision.*

46. *Kennetic is* a word of Bentley's invention. It is formed form the Middle English *kennen,* meaning "to perceive." Arther Bentley, "Kennetic Inquiry," in Ratner, *Inquiry,* **349. Originally published** in ***Science,*** **112** (December **29, 1950): 775-783.**

47. *Ibid.*