

An Innovation in Comparative Political Thought: The Application of Political History

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Abstract

We do not wish to be guilty of introducing a new topic into comparative political thought (CPT), but we must proceed with this essay. For, we are sure that our introduction is not due to the poverty of invention, when one is forced to innovate as a result of desperation, rather than ingenuity. What we are inventing is a term called political history, a form of descriptive political thought. We invent this term in CPT because CPT allows me to apply a range of comparative devices in order to render political history successfully. Note by comparative devices, we mean both compare and contrast methods. These include, differentiation, finding connections by comparing theories, and comparing and contrasting something with itself, to determine inherent paradoxes or self-consistency. We use contrast as a method, for in rendering political history, looking at sameness with comparison is not enough, for difference would still remain. A dialectician might ask, when does complete sameness ever exist? Meaning that to exclude difference leaves an imperfect picture, which could result in the failure of rendering a topic. To classify, one must differentiate by contrast, examining the most important discrepancies of the differentiae.

Keywords: History; Social; Political; Arts

Introduction

Observe that our targeted audience is political scientists, so we expect our audience to have some familiarity with political thought. Further, we wish to instruct them in turning political history into practice, by showing them a comparative analysis of political history and empiricism. Back to the point, descriptive political thought is counter-posed to critical theory, where the former seeks to describe empirical evidence then analyze it, the latter prefers less descriptiveness and aims to critically interpret hypotheses and theories, not letting mere descriptions stand without critique [1,2]. Moreover, political history employs many historical devices. Those that we will be focusing on include neutrality, the structuring or sequencing of empirical evidence, careful topic and citation choices, and cause and effect. By comparing empiricism to political history and defining political history, we argue that political history is invaluable for its practicability, as both academia and politicians look to political historians for practical advice regarding politics. But, we have only concerned with political history as far as it relates to the thought element of CPT, as we seek to innovate CPT's theoretical foundation, introducing political history and arguing for its practicability. Political history relates to the thought part of CPT, not because political history is inherently comparative, rather because it is theoretical, and to render it successfully, we can use comparative devices from CPT. Our purpose is to explicitly render political history, however we adhere both to the rules of being the "clearest possible" and to only express what is necessary for our thesis, as "all additional matter in a definition is superfluous" [1]. Thus, we have omitted all elements of political history irrelevant to our present definition.

Review Strategy

Further, this essay falls into 4 divisions. First, we have introduced our primary sources, briefly contextualizing Francis Bacon and Thomas Hobbes, laying out the comparative foundations for empiricism and political history. Second, we clear up the connection between empiricism and political history. We introduce neutrality, not only by detailing its exact application in this essay's context, but also by analyzing Julius Caesar's political purpose, in his Commentaries on the Gallic War, to show the limitations of neutrality in political history. Third, underlying political history is Hobbes' metaphysics on cause and effect, as his metaphysics allows political historians to record an action, precisely describing it step-by-step. We relate cause and effect to practicability, because with step-by-step processes of past events, these events can be efficiently replicated. Fourth, we free our self from Hobbes' limitations on political history, as we advocate for a systematic materialization of it. For, if its practicability is better known, then this practicability can be more methodic. We make this pointer by revealing the paradox of Hobbes' Leviathan and by clarifying that the practicability of political history is not necessarily anti-democratic [3,4].

In this essay, the primary sources we will be venturing into are Bacon's *The Advancement of Learning* and Hobbes' *Of the Life and History of Thucydides*, as interpreted by Ioannis Evrigenis with his "Hobbes's Thucydides," in the *The Journal of Military Ethics* [3,5]. Further, both Bacon and Hobbes were 17th century British theorists, who had a personal connection with each other [6]. Bacon was a father of the scientific method of empiricism, as he established many of its foundational principles, only to influence Hobbes' political thought with it. The principle at the forefront of empiricism is its approach to knowledge, as it focuses primarily on sense-perception and experience [7]. Rather than forming knowledge simply based on reasoning and convention, Bacon demands that theorists begin understanding with

their sense-perception and experience, in order to derive truth from the ostensible world. The value of empiricism is that it provides a real life foundation, in contrast to something existing only in theory, to support one's understandings. It allows theorists to get to the truth through observation and evidence, as opposed to merely making judgements, assumptions, or conjectures.

Bacon's empiricism lies at the heart of political history [3]. Descriptive political thought, and thus political history, is a form of political thought that aims to neutrally state facts, describing events and truths, and then analyzing them. Neutrally stating facts is empirical, because to know the facts one must observe, and facts are the foundation for one's evidence. As Hobbes states, political history does not allow conjectures and speculations without sufficient evidence following, hence political history's empirical nature [4,5]. Note that Hobbes does not use the term political history in his works, but simply the term history. Since he embeds such a political nature into his discussions on history, and transfers to his political thought his philosophy of Thucydides' *The History of the Peloponnesian War* [5]. We shall refer to Hobbes' use of history as political history. While history is a broader term than political history, the points he makes regarding history, at least those that we explicate in this essay, apply to our theory of political history. Quite simply, once a form of history is used politically, we can call it political history. When a history is used for the purpose of power, whether it is political power or political persuasion, then it is political history. Though structural aspects of writings in history versus political science differ, as the latter is more dialectical and syllogistic, political history can be found in both subjects. An example of a history qualifying as a political history will follow later with our discussion on Caesar. Political science prose can also count as political history, if it is substantially descriptive, employs empirical evidence, details events seriatim, and neutrally states facts. Nonetheless, we must guard against the critic that asks, when is a history ever used apolitically? Our reply is that the term political history should be used when making a significant distinction between history and political history, as the purpose of using terms is to best describe what one wishes to communicate [1]. If it serves no purpose to call a history a political history, then we would refrain from doing so. Such restraint should be shown also in deciding whether a work on political science is political history.

Furthermore, political history differs somewhat from critical theory. The latter seeks to critically interpret hypotheses and theories, from both ethical and logical standpoints. The latter does not allow the justification of positions based on mere descriptions of their existence [2]. Political historians may believe that the justness of a description is self-evident and that it is up to the reader to infer moral judgments [5], however critical theory objects to this descriptive style, as it aims to be outward and clear about subjectivities, which are attitudes and opinions [2]. Critical theory tends to have a moral fundament to it, but empiricism and political history do not. With Bacon's empiricism, he controverts that a scientist should not be deluded with personal prejudices or judgments and should aim for objectivity and empirical evidence in supporting one's reasoning [7,8]. Empiricism is opposed to relying on subjective discourses, the chain of discussions with one discussion building on or refuting another, because they are not necessarily based on facts or evidence. Political history relies also on evidencing accounts and claims as truthfully as possible, even when the truth is not necessarily moral. But, political history goes even further than empiricism, as it introduces distance between the interpreters and the event [5]. Since readers of political history are not actually experiencing the event, nor are they reading moral or

emotional conjectures of it, they can concentrate dispassionately on its certain aspects [5]. This dispassionate approach allows the reader to make judgments that they might not otherwise be able to, if the narration is convoluted with morality. The amoral and dispassionate nature of political history is what Hobbes believes to be invaluable. He believes that this distancing method of political history is the best way for readers to draw lessons from empirical evidence.

Next, we think it is worthwhile to detail political history further, for its rendition needs more substance. Hobbes was an exponent of political history, as his rhetorical writing style in *Leviathan* aims to neutrally state what he believes are facts, allowing the reader to judge without being persuaded by the writer [9]. He believes that the political historian's task should be to select the best sources and evidence possible, and that this task should not be complicated with moral considerations, as he thinks that moral terms lack fixity [5]. Note that what he means by moral fixity is not exactly clear. But, he not only values political history for its empirical nature, he emphasizes that readers are more likely to admit to themselves immoral realities than they are to be persuaded of them [9]. Since readers can interpret political history when they are alone, they can admit to conclusions without being open to others. While critical theory seeks to persuade by argument and critique, political history allows for the facts, which could have an immoral nature, to demonstrate reality for themselves.

Indeed political history is in a way neutral, but it is not entirely so. As Hobbes states, political history uses neutrality to better inform the readership, allowing them to decide what they will with the neutral presentation of the facts [9]. This means that political history still has a purpose, and with that purpose it is value laden, meaning the interests or beliefs underlying a purpose. For instance, when a critic finds a theory inexpedient, it is difficult to criticize that theory based on immoral grounds, lest the critic becomes a proponent for what is immoral. Critical theory works perfectly when it reveals the moral standards of a theory, when the critic is arguing on the side of morality, but to advocate for the truth, despite it being immoral, could become problematic, for immoral truths can be unpleasant. Clearly, political history has a peculiar value and purpose, at times being the method to demonstrate immoral realities when it is in the interest of the political historian to do so, whatever that interest is.

Since political history is less argumentative than critical theory, it concentrates substantially on structure. Thus, factors such as the tone, delivery, event sequence, topic choice, and focus reveals political history's value-nature. For example, Caesar, during the Gallic Wars 58 BCE–51 BCE, provides commentaries to Rome in order to justify his expeditions and conquests of Europe [10]. A commentary is a form of history that describes a series of events, nakedly, without casting overt moral judgments or discussing the motives of the actors involved [3]. Commentaries strive to limit their use of rhetorical devices, to deflect the reader's attention from the author's intent. Further, Caesar structures his Commentaries on the Gallic War to make it appear as if he is discovering parts of Northern Europe [11]. Once tribes are also supposedly discovered, he describes them in such a way to make them appear as a danger to Rome and his immediate situation [11]. This makes his ambitions of conquest seem like they are attacks dependent upon his and Rome's safety. Rather than revealing his plots against European tribes, he makes the beginning of the wars and his initial attacks look like accidents, as courses of action expedient and circumstantial [11]. What his structure reveals, however, is the value behind starting the wars, which is his interest in conquest. This is but one reason why the political historian is rightly called an organizer, for

he or she organizes the facts proposed and in doing so organizes the readership [11]. Just like Caesar, the political historian chooses what facts to omit, what to include, and how to order the sequence of events. He or she forces the readership to focus on certain events over others, deciding what events to conceal within an extensive chain of events, and what events to dramatize. Due to political history's organizational and structural aspects, its value is that it can control the reader's focus.

Nonetheless, the theory of political history is still unfinished, as Hobbes' metaphysics we have yet to discuss. He grounds his political thought in *Of Man* metaphysically [4]. He believes that humans form parts of their conception based on cause and effect, meaning they desire ends due to their perceived effects and they fulfill these ends by understanding the processes to achieve them [4,5]. Hobbes believes that humans construct parts of their memory by perceiving a series of steps to arrive at an end. But, he also believes that humans' memories and imaginations eventually fade, thus political history acts to ensure that intricate processes can be replicated [5]. Again, this is exactly why Hobbes prefers neutral descriptions and narrations, as he desires a clear descriptive structure of an event, making it easier to replicate past successes or avoid past failures. He has no interest in convoluting event descriptions with moral opinions, as he believes that this convolution does not only pose the danger of debasing the reader's judgement, but disrupts the sequence of narration and descriptions, rendering it more difficult to connect events and understand the entirety of a situation [5]. For Hobbes, the power of political history is that it efficiently supplements the readers' memory and attention span, freeing the reader from the dangers of moral opinions, making political history's application more efficient.

But, what is the distinguishing mark of our independent research? Where we assume independence, from Hobbes' political history, is with our pointer regarding the realization of political history. In contrast to Hobbes, we hold that political history should be done for a practical aim. We reject that there is a universal neutrality to political history and empiricism, for though some of their aspects are neutral, they are not neutral entirely. Rhetoric and interpretation may be limited in political history, however the tones, structure, focus, and topics are all chosen and crafted by the political historian. Perhaps the most important aspect of political history is the author's intent. Considering the importance of purpose in political history, take Niccolo Machiavelli's *The Prince* [12]. He states that rulers should adhere to wise counsel and follow the example of great rulers [12]. In order to follow example, rulers must read political history, and such political history is constructed by the political historian. This allows one to influence rulers directly through writing by organizing the subject-matter and controlling the focus of the ruler. Political history does not only instruct students, it also aims to influence rulers. This aim should be known by political historians, for by being conscience of political history's application, the mastery of such practicability will follow. As to have a more complete understanding of one's purpose, frees one from confusion, allowing better predictions about how and why rulers look to political history for wise counsel.

So, what exactly is the systematic practicability of political history? Take Hobbes' intent with the *Leviathan*, where his purpose is very systematic. The *Leviathan* should not be interpreted as a treatise which aims at neutrally ascertaining the truth, but instead as the implementation of rhetorical writing for a practical aim. In *Leviathan*, Hobbes is largely preoccupied with defining concepts, not so much to be accurate, but to end rhetorical debates over definitions in 17th century England [5]. In the 1640s, during the English Civil War, there

were serious conflicts concerning rhetoric between the people, parliament, and the British monarchy [5]. Hobbes believed these conflicts were due largely to demagoguery, irresponsible public discourse [13]. Thus, his philosophy on sovereignty, a term he endeavored to define and theorize in the *Leviathan* throughout chapters 17-19, was not a rigid rubric full of truth claims, rather it was the means to assert power over people authoritatively [5]. Hobbes knew full well how potent an implement political history could be; for, with his *Leviathan*, he rigorously appealed to the aristocracy and monarchy of England, wishing to eliminate room for public engagement, as he marked democracy as dangerous [14]. Hence his belief that words are wise men's counters [4]. He used his *Leviathan* to silence political debates over definitions, not allowing for public discourse [5]. As we have said on pages 4, 6, and 8 of this essay, Hobbes advocates for neutrality in his political history, but this advocacy contradicts his purpose with the *Leviathan*. On the one hand, he is not interested in the purposes of critics and political historians, just wanting neutral descriptions of events and truths, and on the other, he is very purposive, the inflexion of purpose, with his *Leviathan*. Nonetheless, what this paradox shows is the methodic practicability of political history. Political history does not simply aim at the truth, and the systematic nature of Hobbes' *Leviathan*, meaning its well-organized and coherent structure, shows just how purposive he was in trying to influence the people, parliament, and British monarchy in the 1600s [4]. Thus, political historians should take from his example and be as methodic and purposive as possible.

However, we must clear our self of the ambiguity presented from Hobbes' case in point in the last paragraph. We do not necessarily think that Hobbes is right to try and silence public debate. In contrast, we see his purpose as counter-intuitive to the practicability of political history, for political history can be democratic, as it can be a form of civic engagement. We wish to foster more civic engagement from political historians, not silence them. Thus, we cannot let Hobbes have the last words regarding civic engagement. we draw from his example to foreground how even he, who advocates for neutrality, is in fact deeply systematic and purposive. While the application of political history has certainly been exemplified by his intent, the practicability does not carry anti-democratic connotations.

These then are the points we have related, from empiricism and Hobbes' political history, in order to render what we mean by political history, using both comparative and definitional devices. We have differentiated between political history and critical theory, disclosing that the former is more descriptive than the latter, where the former takes a neutral approach; the latter seeks to criticize on moral grounds. We detailed neutrality's application in political history, using the example of Caesar to uncover where the purpose lies in political history. Then, we announced the application of political history, predicting that since rulers ought to adhere to political history, political historians should be prepared to influence these rulers through writing.

Conclusion and Discussion

Though the paradox of Hobbes' intent serves as an example of political history's practicability, we do not hold his pessimism against democracy. we could have written an essay getting finicky over what a fact or political power is, but not a work better at arguing the application of political history, at least within the limits we have set. Again, defining what the apolitical and evil of immorality means was beyond this inquiry, as we have clearly delineated our limits to the

application of political history, as far as thought in CPT is concerned. But, perhaps we have omitted much. For, we would have liked to spend further words on neutrality, the interests of a political historian, and what exactly wise counsel is. As if that was it, for how and why rulers use political history and how democracy relates still need an answer. Surely the fact of these questions arising only demands further inquiry and the greater the demand, the greater the success with the present rendition of political history.

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