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Political Education and the History of Political Thought

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Texts designed to introduce political science students to the history of political thought or to past political theories have been commonplace in the discipline, as have disputes about their pedagogical utility or justifiability, and methodological debates concerning their adequacy or legitimacy. In an effort to address these disputes and some of these debates, I construct three models of historiographical inquiry. Each model represents a particular approach, and each is defined in terms of three common features. The methodological debates are joined both indirectly and directly: indirectly by identifying clearly the major features and purposes of these approaches, and directly by consideration of such issues as the nature of a historical tradition, the legitimacy of certain interpretive strategies and presuppositions, and the viability of certain conceptions of past political theory. I conclude that each approach can make significant contributions to the education of political science students.

Texts that examine the history of political thought "from ancient to modern times" or focus on political theories "from Plato to Marx" have been widely used in courses dealing with these topics since at least the turn of the century. Typically designed only to provide an introduction to the subject matter, these studies combine original research with secondary scholarship in a variety of formats emphasizing sometimes divergent perspectives and pedagogical concerns. Despite this diversity, the authors of these texts all agree on one point: the study of Western political thought provides one of the foundations of a sound education in political science.

The central purpose of this article is to reconfirm that a familiarity with the history of political thought can contribute to political education in two main ways: it can develop in students the historical knowledge, and especially the historical sense, necessary to an adequate understanding of political study and political life, and it can help to cultivate in students the ability to think systematically, analytically, creatively, and critically about political ideas, practices, and problems.

These essentially instrumental arguments will be developed by analyzing and defending precisely those texts that have presupposed their cogency. One advantage of this somewhat indirect strategy is that it will allow me to contribute to some of the recent methodological debates about this literature,[1] even though my primary aim is to defend the study of past political thought and theory against a series of longstanding criticisms. There have always been, and there are today, at least some political scientists who question the utility, necessity, or desirability of the study of political thought and its history. One objection concerns the relationship between political philosophy and political science. According to this view, political science is (or should be) a purely scientific discipline, and neither political philosophy nor that part of it concerned with past political theories has much to offer the student or scholar. Especially prevalent during the rise of behavioralism, this argument reflects the position that political philosophy is a normative (and hence irrelevant) enterprise and that past theories are, as well, both ideological and outdated. The conclusion is that interest in the history of theory is not merely a waste of intellectual energy but a veritable obstacle to political education and to the development of modern scientific political theory.[2]

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[1] I refer to the methodological discussion and debates launched in the 1960s by Pocock (1962), Dunn (1968), and Skinner (1969). Representative discussions include Sanderson (1968), Leslie (1970), Pocock (1971, 1980), Skinner (1972, 1974), Tarlton (1973), Schochet (1974), Wiener (1974), Ashcraft (1975, 1980), Gunnell (1978, 1979), and Tarcov (1982).

[2] Advocates of both the new science movement in the 1920s, and of behavioralism in the 1950s and 1960s, adopted these and related positions. Examples of the former include Charles Merriam, George Catlin, and William Bennett Munro; of the latter, Harold Lasswell,

A second common objection is that those political scientists specializing in political philosophy or theory are (or are in constant danger of becoming) antiquarians, that the study of past thought ought to be a secondary or tertiary activity rather than a full-time occupation or obsession. According to this argument, in other words, students and scholars of political philosophy do little except study, reinterpret, and debate past ideas and theories, whereas they should be concerned with the construction and criticism of current political ideas and theories.[3]

Albeit for different reasons, these two objections are opposed to the attention paid to past theories. Both would like to see those political scientists specializing in political philosophy redirect their energies to certain present-day endeavors: in one case, to the work needed for the development of empirical theories; in the other, to the development of normative theories. By contrast, a third objection opposes, not the study of past thought per se, but a particular type of study often termed the historicist or historical kind. This kind of study is characterized by its focus on distinctively historical questions, and it is for this reason condemned as irrelevant to the student of politics. According to the argument, historicist studies are indefensible because they miss the main point, which is to utilize the study of past thought for present-day purposes.[4]

A compelling response to these objections would demonstrate that exposure to the history of political thought is virtually indispensable to the education of political science students and that continued scholarship in this area must in consequence be encouraged and applauded. I intend to provide such a response by defending the texts mentioned above and hereafter referred to as "histories." The defense can be restricted in this fashion because these histories have been specifically designed to acquaint students with past political thought or theory, have been traditionally justified on precisely the sort of instrumental grounds I am seeking, and because they presuppose and embody the collective research of scholars in the field.

An overview of these histories demonstrates considerable variety; different authors have approached and presented the subject matter in different ways for different reasons. This circumstance requires the construction of models or ideal types, each representing a fairly common approach to the writing of this sort of history. The models are defined in terms of three features: the subject matter included, called the "focus" of a history; the central questions posed in a history, called "primary objectives"; and underlying assumptions, called "presuppositions," which typically accompany given foci and objectives. Based on these criteria, I depict and defend three models. Of course, no actual history will be fully characterized by any one of the models, and any actual history will almost surely share some features present in more than one model. But because my primary interest is justificatory (rather than descriptive), the simplicity of the models presents no problem.

The Historical Model

The first model I define and defend is the historical model. Real-life approximations to it include the histories of Dunning (1902), Sabine (1961), and Sibley (1970). The focus of this model is broad, including all levels of political and social thought from the popular to the philosophical. Although interested in the exposition of political ideas and theories, the primary objective of the scholar adopting this model is to explain why political ideas and theories appear when and where they do, why they change over time, and why (or whether) they have any influence on contemporaneous and subsequent thought and behavior. These three objectives may be abbreviated as an inquiry into the historical genesis, development, and influence of political thought in the West.

The presuppositions that the historian brings to this sort of history are as follows. First he assumes that all forms of thought are embedded in historically specific "contexts" and, in particular, that political ideas and theories "are produced as a normal part of the social milieu in which politics itself has its being" (Sabine, 1961, p. v). This presupposition is made for two reasons: first, it is believed that the interpretation of past ideas and theories requires knowledge of their associated

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Robert Dahl, and, depending on how one interprets him, David Easton. Lasswell's comments are typical: In the recent past, said he, historians of political theory "were so weighed down with the burden of genteel erudition that they had little intellectual energy left with which to evolve original theory. . . . Hence empirical work in political science received a minimum of constructive aid from scholars formally responsible for political theory" (Lasswell, 1954, p. 201).

[3]This position has been especially popular since the 1950s and has been articulated by, for example, J. Roland Pennock, Alfred Cobban, Robert Dahl, David Easton, and to some extent Richard Ashcraft.

[4]Prototypes of historicist studies were said to be the works of Dunning, McIlwain, and Sabine, and were condemned in the terms described by David Easton (1953), Andrew Hacker (1954, 1961) and William Bluhm (1962). Similar views were expressed earlier by W. W. Willoughby; Leo Strauss also raised similar complaints.

contexts, because such contexts are assumed to condition, determine, or otherwise provide clues to: 1) the meanings (sense, reference, connotations) of specific terms and expressions and of the conventions governing the application or use of concepts, arguments, and methods of political thinkers; 2) the identity and characteristics of tacit assumptions and arguments made by thinkers; and 3) the intentions or goals motivating thinkers. In addition, it is supposed that knowledge of the contexts of ideas and theories can help explain their geneses. Particularly popular here have been the contentions that ideas and theories constitute responses both to perceived political problems or crises and to the influences of partisan and intellectual contemporaries or predecessors.

These beliefs demonstrate a second presupposition of the model: the idea that the composition of contexts is complex. In histories resembling the model, it has been traditionally maintained that the context of ideas and theories contains existential and ideational features. Political crises and conflicts, major political events and trends, and political institutions have been among the most emphasized features of the existential component, although general socioeconomic conditions and trends, religious institutions and movements, and many other variables have been included as well. With respect to the ideational component, popular beliefs and norms, and the intellectual climate (including scientific, philosophical, and religious theories, fashions, and beliefs) have been most emphasized.

The complexity of contexts is underscored by the additional assumption that they always contain a significant historical component. Specifically, it is assumed that many of the features constitutive of contexts are rooted in the pasts to which, in turn, thinkers are linked. Persistent or recurring controversies and conflicts, intellectual and political traditions, and inherited prejudices and practices are examples. It is partly because contexts are assumed to include a historical dimension that the question of influence arises. Given the assumption, the historian tries to explain how political ideas and theories exert an influence on subsequent thought or practice and thereby become agents of change, stabilizing elements within successive contexts, or both.

A final presupposition of the model is that contexts change over time and space. This assumption guides, indeed underpins, the historian's account of conceptual change and development. In those histories that resemble the model, the identification and description of changing contexts are typically used to help explain, in narrative fashion, why and how "the political consciousness of men has passed from early antiquity to modern times" through a series of "successive transformations" (Dunning, 1902, p. xviii), and why the "reinterpretation and readaptation" of received beliefs and theories have been one of the characteristic chores of political thinkers (Sabine, 1961, p. 145). The idea of accounting for conceptual change and development by focusing on changing contexts is also emphasized in monographs that resemble the historical model—as when, for instance, an author seeks to tell "the story" or how "the modern concept of the State came to be formed" by "considering the historical development which prompted this conceptual change" (Skinner, 1978, pp. ix, x).

The interrelated focus, objectives, and presuppositions of this model constitute a coherent historiographical approach to the writing of a history. My primary defense of histories resembling the model will be that they are particularly well suited to developing in students the historical knowledge, and especially the historical sensibility, necessary to an adequate understanding of both political study and political life. Although this is my main contention, I also argue briefly that these histories can encourage in students creative and critical thinking. These arguments are developed as I outline three specific themes or hypotheses which one would expect to emerge, and which in fact typically do emerge, from this kind of history. The first of these is the theme of diversity; the second a hypothesis asserting the interdependence of politics and political thought; the third, the emphasis placed on the historical character of the objects and methods of political study.

An obvious and certainly common defense of the "historical" history concerns the benefits provided by its emphasis on the diversity of political thought and life. Once the historian commits himself to the suppositions that all forms of political thought are to some extent context dependent and that contexts change over time, his account of the history of political thought will stress diversity. This emphasis should awaken students to the plurality of political ideas and ideals, perspectives and theories, and of forms of political life. However we might judge Sabine's history, for example, a student cannot read it and then claim that all persons and communities seek the same goods or ends; that concepts such as democracy, freedom, and justice have either only one meaning or always have the same meaning over time; that there is but one way of studying politics, organizing political and social life, or justifying political practices and principles.

An exposure to the diversity of political thought and life can thus shake up preconceptions and prejudices, liberating students from the tyranny of conventional modes of thinking. It can encourage creativity and critical thought by enlarg-

ing the sense of the possible and undermining the supposed certainty or "naturalness" of current shibboleths and reifications. In other words, a healthy sense of diversity can provide a counterbalance to intellectual smugness or ossification, a sensitivity to the fact that virtually all political and social concepts and ideals are problematic and contested and can be exploited for different purposes by political ideologues, theorists, and scientists. Moreover, although this emphasis can help students discern the provincial and modern in contemporary institutional arrangements, ideologies, and theories, an exposure to the history of Western political thought can demonstrate to students that "truly novel ideas in the domains of morals and politics are extremely rare" (Sibley, 1970, p. 7).

Although a healthy sense of the diversity of political thought and of forms of political life is encouraged by these histories, even more significant is the illumination provided by the hypothesis that political thought and political life are interdependent, reflecting and constrained by one another. The hypothesis is commonplace in such histories: According to Dunning (1902, pp. 1-2), for example, "the only path of approach to an accurate apprehension of political [thought and] philosophy is through political history"; and Sabine (1961, p. v) similarly professed that his study was written "in light of the hypothesis that theories of politics are themselves a part of politics." The elaboration and defense of this hypothesis produces a variety of claims which, I want to argue, contribute in important ways to political education.

One claim associated with the hypothesis is that political thought is always to some extent conditioned and constrained by political and social life. The existential problems addressed by thinkers, the ideas and ideals that they articulate and defend or criticize, the institutions and behaviors assumed or condemned, the alternatives propounded and possibilities foreseen—all these and more are limited, to some extent even determined, by the prevailing political arrangements, institutions, and conflicts within which thought takes shape. Similarly, developments in political thought seem often to follow developments in political and social life as, for example, relatively new ideas and ideals, and relatively novel perspectives on collective problems and possibilities, were ushered in by the emergence and spread of the Christian church and by the experience of modern industrialization.

Historical knowledge of this sort, presented in some detail in the historical history, is surely of value to the student of politics. It has in the first instance obvious intrinsic value because this historical knowledge is also political knowledge and, as such, ought to be a part of political education, but, in addition, the awareness that political thought so often reflects and is limited by political experience can alert students to the difficulty political scientists confront whenever they seek to develop transhistorical or transcultural knowledge of political phenomena. In this way, it teaches not merely humility and modesty; it underscores the absolute necessity of historical knowledge for those who would seek to generalize about politics.

A second and related claim associated with the hypothesis is that political thought is often biased by partisanship or socioeconomic position. By locating thinkers within the political and social context of which they were a part, the historian is able to illustrate how political creeds and ideals often reflect, promote, mask, or mystify political, religious, or socioeconomic interests and arrangements such as prevailing distributions of power, wealth, and privilege. Although presented in the context of the history of political thought, this sort of knowledge is obviously not limited to its historical setting. The recognition that political thought is typically connected to political interests can help students understand and better assess contemporary political rhetoric, partisan and ideological conflict, and the attachment to particular positions, creeds, and symbols by political groups and leaders. Further, the demonstration that "many bodies of ideas can plausibly be interpreted, at least in part, as rationalizations of a given *status quo*" can place the student "on guard about one's own thinking and the degree to which it can transcend the pressures of class, cultural, and national interest" (Sibley, 1970, p. 6).

It is sometimes alleged that the historical histories do a disservice to students by making it appear as if political philosophy, like more popular and partisan forms of thought, is historically conditioned, limited, and ideological. This allegation is mistaken because exaggerated. In these histories political philosophers are indeed said to produce arguments and recommendations related to identifiable interests, groups, struggles, and crises within specific societies, but there is at the same time great reluctance to conclude that political philosophy is reducible to ideology or partisan pleading. Consider, as a relevant illustration, Sabine's Hobbes. Examining Hobbes's work in the political context of the English civil wars, Sabine argues (what is now controversial) that one of Hobbes's purposes was to defend not just royal absolutism, but "the royalist party and . . . the pretensions of the Stuarts" (1961, p. 456). At the same time, however, Sabine demonstrates that Hobbes's political persuasion and alleged political interests hardly exhaust what he was about and what he produced. He does this by relating Hobbes's intentions and products to a much

wider social milieu and to an intellectual environment neither exclusively English nor contemporary.

By examining Hobbes's thought in this much wider context, Sabine shows how little a partisan Hobbes really was and demonstrates that Hobbes's thought was to some extent conditioned and limited not by his immediate political environment and alleged goals, but by the much wider range of his experience and knowledge and by the rich stock of ideas, beliefs, and perspectives available to him. Hobbes's theory is thus shown to transcend its immediate environment by virtue of its breadth, depth, and ambitions; it is comparable neither to the thought of the ideologue nor to the typical thinker of the time. Sabine is drawn to this judgment precisely by examining Hobbes's thought contextually; for it is very hard to confuse Hobbes, who set out to "make his system broad enough to account, on scientific principles, for all the facts of nature, including human behavior in its individual and social aspects," with contemporaries whose purposes were exclusively partisan or whose writings were less ambitious, less abstract and systematic, and less informed by a variety of intellectual traditions (1961, p. 457).

The reporting of an ideological dimension in what are shown to be penetrating and lasting theories of politics can serve to warn students not to confuse disciplinary demands for methodological sophistication and scientific objectivity with the absence of partisanship. Systematic, reflective, sustained political inquiry and the development of genuine political understanding and insight are as much the products of political interest and concerns as of scientific method. Secondly, political philosophies are indeed shown to have lasting relevance not (simply) by abstracting them from their historical contexts but, rather, by demonstrating how a proper understanding of those contexts helps account for their relative scarcity, lasting value, and persistent influence.[5] Reverting to the example at hand, Hobbes can be shown to have produced

> a theory natural to an age which [given the rise of individualism] saw the wreck of so many of the traditional associations and institutions of economic and religious life and which saw above all the emergence of powerful states in which the making of law became the typical activity. These tendencies—the increase of legal power and the recognition of self-interest as the dominant motive in life—have been among the most pervasive in modern times. That Hobbes made them the premises of his system and followed them through with relentless logic is the true measure of his philosophical insight and of his greatness as a political thinker. (1961, p. 475)

The hypothesis of interdependence asserts that political thought arises out of, reflects, and is constrained and changed by political and social life; it also asserts the reverse. Consequently, histories that resemble the historical model provide the important—even if in some quarters controversial—service of reminding students not to discount the impact of political thought on behaviors and processes. "This assumes, of course, that men's images of the world . . . affect the way they behave (Sibley, 1970, p. 6), that political ideas and theories need to be taken into account when explaining political conduct not because these ideas and theories "are true but because they are believed" (Sabine, 1939, p. 10).

Exploration of this aspect of the hypothesis takes a variety of related forms. For example, the historian is likely to describe how ideas and ideologies have in the past motivated actors by identifying for them political problems and possible solutions, ends, and means. He will provide accounts of how ideas have generated or fueled conflict by legitimating or condemning particular leaders or groups, movements, or institutions, and by articulating and defending interests and ideals. He will try to explain how popular beliefs or systems of thought have provided criteria for defining political phenomena and frameworks within which political reality was perceived, meaningfully ordered, and acted upon. And he will describe how ideals characteristically functioned as standards against which behaviors and institutions were judged and how, sometimes, they functioned also as goals toward which political decisions and actions were directed and so became embodied in institutions, laws, or policies.

Although a familiarity with these arguments and accounts can be defended as contributing to political education on an individual basis, it is their collective purpose or impact which must be stressed. All of them help the student to understand and explore the thesis that the character, quality, and direction of political life is a function of the interplay between nature, habit, fortune, and autonomous social processes, and human thought, purpose, and struggle. Given that this thesis is central to the study of politics—it is either presupposed or examined by political scientists all the time—we should conclude that the historical history provides an important service by introducing students to it.

Finally, this history emphasizes the historical nature of the objects and methods of political inquiry; that is, political life and thought and the

[5]For relevant comments see Sabine (1953).

methods and theories used to study them are shaped by the past. I conclude my defense of this model by arguing that an exposure to this kind of historical understanding makes an especially important contribution to political education because, although at one time it was widely taught in the discipline, it is largely neglected today.[6]

Sabine (1906, p. 17) expressed this historical understanding particularly well when he observed that all things political (and indeed all things human) do not merely *have* a history; they *are* historical. We did not, for example, invent our political vocabularies ourselves; nor did we invent our political practices, institutions, beliefs, and theories; they are historical products, and understanding them even in rudimentary ways requires knowing something about their histories, about how they got here, and why they take the form they do. Thus present-day meanings of liberalism and Marxism, of freedom and justice, and of citizenship and law, contain connotations and associations that are historical in origin yet preserved in contemporary thought and dialogue. Similarly, institutions and practices embody intentions, purposes, meanings, and ideals whose development influences our current understanding and therefore our reactions to, participation in, and evaluation of those institutions and practices. So, too, for instance, the absence or presence of beliefs and practices in given societies can usually be explained only as the products of particular historical experiences and traditions, explanations that assume precisely the kind of historical understanding emphasized in the historical history.

Political theories and methods are likewise historical creatures, inventions of men and women familiar with certain historical experiences and heirs of particular intellectual traditions. For instance, consider current theories that postulate, after the fashion of modern economics, rational self-interested behavior. This postulate is popular partly because it appears reasonable, even "natural," to thinkers who live in a culture that has legitimized and reinforced calculating self-interested behavior and also because, for the same reason, it often facilitates explanation and prediction. Similarly, both the current interest in and prevailing conceptions of explanation and prediction are historical products, in this case expressions of a rationalistic culture and of an evolving conception of science dating at least to the seventeenth century.

The kind of understanding made familiar to readers of the historical histories also demonstrates why their authors use a narrative style. Because every present is shaped by its past, the history of political thought must to some extent be an unfolding story. It does not follow that these histories reify a unitary tradition of Western thought as some critics (e.g., Gunnell, 1979; Pocock, 1962) have alleged; this criticism is best directed elsewhere. Although these histories tell a story, the critics forget that its structure is complex, that it embodies discontinuities as well as continuities, and that it identifies the rise and fall of multiple traditions operating at many levels of experience. Consequently, the real weakness of these studies is that they tax the very limits of historical scholarship and for that reason need constant revision. The point here has been to argue that revisions ought to be welcomed, for they also will demonstrate that political understanding must be informed by a sense of history and by a historical sensibility.

The Traditional Model

The last two models reflect historiographies devised by scholars who, writing during the heyday of behavioralism, feared that the study of past political thought and theory was in danger of extinction, and who therefore sought to demonstrate that the study of past political theory was not an antiquarian exercise and that these theories were not uninteresting or irrelevant by virtue of their old age or alleged ethical, ideological, or unscientific character.

The result was the construction of historiographies and histories that contended that, in the history of the West, certain political theories are classics and that studying them is both relevant and significant to the education of political scientists. The primary focus of these histories is therefore on the so-called classic political theories rather than on the many levels of political thought characteristic of the historical model. In addition, a presupposition common to these histories is that there are indeed identifiable classic or great theories deserving of close attention and scrutiny.

These similarities notwithstanding, the histories to which I allude are of two relatively distinct sorts, the first of which is the traditional model. What is especially distinctive about this model is the claim that the classics constitute a great tradition of Western political theory or philosophy, and the contention that this tradition is as important an object of inquiry and understanding as the individual theories that purportedly constitute it.

[6]The importance for political science of the kind of historical understanding I am describing here was often stressed by earlier generations of political scientists, no doubt because of the institutional and intellectual connections between political science and history characteristic of the discipline in its formative years. See as examples Smith (1886) and Burgess (1897).

The foci of histories resembling this model, then, are the classic theories and the great tradition, and their objective is the critical analysis of both the classics and the tradition, i.e., its historical development.

Examples of works adopting these foci and objectives are the histories of Strauss (1953), Wolin (1960), and Nelson (1982); in each the great tradition is understood not simply as a chronological sequence of works and authors who share certain similarities or affinities but as a relatively close-knit intellectual tradition whose participants were conscious of and deeply concerned about their predecessors, and each of whom sought to contribute to the development of political theory over time. In other words, each contributed to an evolving activity and, in the words of Wolin (1960, p. 1) and Nelson (1982, p. 2) to "a tradition of discourse."

Although not part of the model, these three histories also adopt certain substantive claims about the tradition. These claims need to be identified because they serve in these works as instrumental justifications for the focus on the historical development of the tradition. The central contention is that the tradition has in some important senses declined over time. The basis of this judgment is essentially twofold: first, it is asserted that political theory as traditionally conceived and practiced has been lost or denigrated; in addition, it is claimed that the more recent phases of the tradition have had a negative impact on contemporary thought and practice by giving rise to certain practices and beliefs that are judged deficient or harmful. The central justification for focusing on the classics is therefore that the student will come to understand (and perhaps be encouraged to emulate) a now lost or denigrated, but valuable, way of doing systematic political thinking, and the central justification for examining the historical development of the tradition is that the student will come to understand why this sorry state of affairs has come to pass.

Brief examples can help illuminate these remarks. In the case of Strauss (1953, pp. 35-36), a central position is that "political philosophers from Plato to Hegel" all wrestled with the problem of "natural right"—i.e., with the proposition that the discovery and justification of transhistorical standards of right or justice are possible. Premodern, especially Greek, political philosophers defended this proposition; modern theorists (after Aquinas) rejected it. On both philosophical and political grounds, Strauss favored the Greek position and therefore characterized the tradition of political theory as degenerative; it culminates in the rise of ethical relativism and the death of political theory as traditionally practiced. It is the demise of natural right and traditional political philosophy (or the rise of relativism and positive social science) that Strauss identified as the crux of our modern predicaments, practical as well as intellectual. His critical analysis of the classics and of the tradition was thus explicitly designed to illuminate the origins and nature of these predicaments and the superior arguments of the pre-modern political theorists.

Wolin presents a somewhat parallel case. In his view, traditional theorists sought "to identify and define [the] truly political" and to defend the dignity, distinctiveness, and importance of the political as that "order created to deal with those concerns [common to all]" (1960, pp. 289, 9). Since the seventeenth century, however, the "vision of political theory has been a disintegrating one, constantly working to destroy the idea that society ought to be considered as a whole and that its general life was best expressed through political forms" (1960, p. 430). This disintegration corresponds to, and is partly responsible for, the disintegration and denigration of political life in contemporary societies which Wolin refers to as the "decline" and "sublimation" of "the political." Accordingly, he too characterizes the tradition in terms of a decline: the decline of traditional theory and of "the political." His history is intended to explain the origins and characteristics of these modern problems and, at the same time, to disclose the "urgent task" of restoring the traditional understanding of political theory "as that form of knowledge which deals with what is general and integrative" (1960, p. 434).

Although his history presents less of a narrative, Nelson also organizes his work around a particular theme, in this case around "the shifting relationship of ethics and politics from the beginning of Western political thought to the present time" (1982, p. 1). The historical development portrayed is again one of decline, for the ancient and medieval theorists rightly conceived of politics as a moral activity, whereas modern theorists, beginning with Machiavelli, tended to sever ethics from politics. Ideologies, asserted to be a "response to the dilemmas arising out of the modern divorce of ethics and politics," complete the decline of the tradition, help to explain the loss of traditional theory, and underscore the "need" we have today "to devise political philosophies that unify ethics and politics" (1982, pp. 1-2, 332).

It is important to reiterate that the instrumental justifications underlying these histories are explicitly tied to substantive concerns about present-day politics and political thought. A central goal of these works is to indict or to question contemporary affairs, practices, or beliefs, and to identify a presumably valuable mode or activity of political thinking that has been denigrated and

lost. By disclosing in a critical fashion the different visions of the great theorists, for instance, Wolin believes he is introducing students to ways of conceiving political phenomena and of constructing political theories that are genuinely unique and integrative while, at the same time, exposure to these theories throws into sharp relief the less worthy conceptions and modes of political thinking and inquiry that characterize the present day.

The central presuppositions underlying the traditional model and these histories are therefore quite obvious, and they have come in for a great deal of methodological criticism in recent years. First and foremost is the presupposition that there exists an identifiable set of classic works, of master political theorists, who engaged in substantially the same kind of activity or endeavor despite their separation in time and space. Also important are the presuppositions that these authors are members of a tightly knit historical tradition, and that this tradition has had and continues to have a substantial impact on thought and practice.

Each of these presuppositions has been criticized by a number of writers, but most prominently by Pocock (1962, 1971, 1980), Dunn (1968), and Skinner (1969), and by Gunnell (1978, 1979), who deplores more fully their supposition that the classical theorists were members of a unitary tradition is a myth. These authors also charge that the idea that the tradition has been as causally efficacious as asserted is an article of faith for which there is little evidence. Finally, the presuppositions that the masters were engaged in a common activity, or that they commonly addressed some particular issue or problem, is also rejeced by most or all of these critics.

A defense of the model would therefore seem to require a defense of the presuppositions underlying it. Yet many of the criticisms levelled at those histories that resemble the model seem to me quite legitimate. The basic problem is that the classic or great works do not in fact form a unitary tradition in the manner presupposed by the model. This is not to say that the masters were not engaged in a common activity, a point to which I return; rather the masters were not self-consciously participating in a great dialogue or tradition whose contours can be presented in terms of a coherent narrative and whose meaning and import prove causally relevant to contemporary events and intellectual fashions. To discuss the putative tradition in this way is to endow it with the sorts of properties that we legitimately ascribe to, say, the nineteenth-century utilitarian tradition in Britain. And this, as Gunnell and the others argue, is a mistake: "What is presented as a historical tradition is in fact basically a retrospective analytical construction which constitutes a rationalized version of the past" (Gunnell, 1979, p. 70).

To label the tradition a myth is not, however, to undermine altogether the traditional model. As Gunnell makes clear, historians and other scholars can legitimately identify "certain similarities and differences in a range of chronologically ordered works and speak of this as a tradition with continuity and change" (1979, p. 85). Of course this presupposes that the similarities identified are not themselves invented or mythic, and here Gunnell appears to part company with the other critics mentioned, and especially with Pocock. Gunnell seems to believe that the classic works actually share certain important similarities, so that a critical focus on them can be justified on pedagogical grounds. He appears in fact to accept the very Wolin-like position that the classics creatively engage "the problem of political order and that, in terms of their content and the circumstances of their production, they bear certain family resemblances, and possess certain common motifs, which make it reasonable to construct a paradigm of political theory and the political theorist to which specific works conform in varying degrees" (1979, p. 136).

According to Pocock (1980, pp. 566-567), however, Gunnell's position merely replicates the errors of the traditional model, except of course that in Gunnell's version the classical theorists "do not constitute a [historical] tradition any more." For Pocock, rejecting the myth of the tradition is not enough; one must also reject the myth of the masters, i.e., the supposition that they can, without historical distortion, be treated as species of the same genus. In what follows I defend Gunnell, and so the traditional model *as corrected* or modified, against Pocock.

The somewhat complicated position I adopt is that the traditional model is in some ways deficient, but that certain central features of it deserve our support. With respect to deficiencies, the model errs in two fundamental ways: it ascribes to the great tradition a historical specificity and coherence that the tradition does not possess, and it ascribes to this tradition a causal impact on past and contemporary events and thought it never had. The first error can be easily rectified by following Gunnell's suggestion that the tradition be understood, and be explicitly presented to students as, an analytical construct. The second error needs simply to be admitted and no longer repeated. Although we can not and should not ignore the influence particular masters had on subsequent members of the tradition, it should be obvious that if we want to provide a historical account of past and contemporaneous practices and beliefs, we simply cannot "concentrate on the

received canon of classic texts" (Skinner, 1974, p. 280). We must instead adopt something like the historiography embodied in the historical model.

At the same time, however, we need to recognize the legitimacy and pedagogical utility of the traditional history. In the first place, there is nothing wrong or untoward with using the tradition, conceived as an analytical construct, as a device through which scholars present and examine significant political or theoretical issues such as the problem of ethical relativism, the meaning, boundaries, and importance of "the political," or the relationship between politics and ethics. We can use the tradition in this way because the masters did, as a matter of historical fact, speak to these issues. They often addressed the question of moral standards, they certainly examined the nature and importance of politics, and they typically considered the relationship between politics and ethics. It is true that they did not do only these things, and it is true that they did not all think that these or any other specific issues were of equal importance or were even of central concern. But the traditional model need not deny these truths, and a fair reading of traditional histories indicates that they do not deny them either.

A second justification of the traditional history is that treating the classics as exemplars of a valuable activity and submitting them to a process of critical analysis serves to engage the student in political thinking. To repeat, the behavioral movement within political science led to a renewed emphasis on the importance of establishing the direct relevance of the study of the history of political thought. In many cases this meant shifting attention or emphasis from the *history* of political *thought* to the *study* of political *theory*. Essentially what was claimed was that the great theories must be directly relevant to political education because they were and are, after all, recognized classics. All of the justificatory arguments that followed from this premise necessarily assumed that the so-called classics deserved their title. Did they? Do they?

In a general but important sense they surely do. A classic is anything of recognized worth or excellence. As such, the term is honorific, and it is conventionally applied only to historical artifacts that have through time been influential or revered or both. The contention, then, was and is that in the history of the West certain works and authors—Plato and Aristotle, Augustine and Aquinas, Machiavelli and Hobbes, Locke and Rousseau, Hegel and Marx, and a few others—have been remarkably influential (as compared to lesser writers) and often revered. The historical evidence for this claim, including the fact that educated people in this century continue to read these authors, is so overwhelming that, in the general sense described, the assumption is justified.

But if we ask why these works and authors are classics—if, that is to say, we seek an explanation for their persistence and honorific status—disputes are possible, and the assignment of individual works and authors to the category can become uncertain and controversial (see, e.g., Sanderson, 1968). In the histories of the 1950s and 1960s, however, there was considerable agreement. Two qualities are most often ascribed to the classics in order to explain their lasting value and attractiveness, first that the classics raise the fundamental or the perennial questions and problems of politics, and second that they embody insightful, comprehensive theories or visions of politics.

Complete agreement on what precisely "comprehensiveness" means is absent from these histories, but there is some consensus. In general, comprehensiveness refers to three characteristics of the classics which they all meet to some extent. First, these theories embrace normative and practical as well as descriptive and explanatory concerns. Second, they often include or reflect philosophical positions and theories, such as an epistemology and metaphysic, worked out by their authors. Third, these theories consider in thoughtful and typically systematic ways a wide variety of phenomena and issues that can enhance political understanding and yet are not narrowly political—human nature and its bearing on collective existence, the place of ethics and education in political life, and the relationships between politics and culture, religion, and economics, are some standard examples.

Explaining the historical persistence and honorific status of the masters in this way supports the further claim that they, at some not-too-abstract a level, were involved in the same activity. They all constructed—more or less successfully, depending on cases and judges—comprehensive theories, and they all addressed the perennial issues of politics; indeed, these theories can be legitimately read as if they constitute responses to, or engagements with, the fundamental or timeless (and not merely timely) political problems. If this is so, histories that identify, elucidate, and discuss critically these perennial issues are eminently justifiable, eminently relevant; and this is precisely the position taken by the perennial-issues model, a model I discuss and defend below.

The traditional model also discusses the perennial issues; in fact, histories resembling this model typically organize their critical analyses of the classic theories around one of these perennial issues (e.g., around the relationship between ethics and politics) as we have seen. But the traditional history also emphasizes the comprehensiveness of the classics. The claim is that it is especially this feature and not just the confrontation with

particular perennial issues which makes the classics so valuable. To recover these comprehensive theories or visions, to understand how they were put together or fashioned whole, and to assess critically the claims and perspectives they advanced are, in the traditional model, rightfully seen as contributions to political education, as invitations to modes of political thinking or theorizing in which students can participate.

Before amplifying this additional argument for the traditional model, let me make clear my opposition to Pocock's position. Pocock denies, while I wish to affirm, that the classics are exemplars of a certain broadly conceived kind of intellectual activity that issues in comprehensive theories of politics. This is not simply or largely a retrospective analytical construction; it is rather a reasonably accurate factual claim, an eminently plausible interpretation of the historical evidence, primarily of the texts in question. It helps explain why the classics have persisted as objects of interest and often of respect, and explains as well why the emphatically contextual research undertaken by historians such as Pocock has not undermined this position. Of course I cannot prove this contention here, but if we grant at least some validity to it, a good case can be made for an additional justificatory argument for the traditional histories. Very briefly I make this case by explaining what a critical analysis of the classics—conceived as comprehensive theories of politics—involves.

This instrumental defense focuses on the process of critical analysis through which the historian or scholar seeks to "understand," and to "evaluate" or "assess," the classics. Exactly what this process substantively demonstrates will of course vary from historian to historian because different historians will entertain somewhat different conceptions of what the classics are or what the masters did; they will emphasize or select different aspects or features of the theories examined, sometimes examine different writings of the same theorist, will use different standards of criticism, and will sometimes use different techniques or rules of interpretation.

Despite these differences in preconceptions, emphases, selection, standards, and techniques, I want to argue that the process of critical analysis in all cases offers students the opportunity to participate in political thinking. This can be briefly explained by pointing out that critical analysis demands of the historian analytic, synthetic, and critical skills. Analysis and synthesis require that the historian disassemble into constitutive parts the theories examined and that he explain how the parts, such as premises, definitions, preferences, and criticisms, are interconnected to form comprehensive wholes. It is this process that helps to produce an understanding of the theories examined for both historian and student. But more important, it involves the reader, as it involves the historian, in political thinking. For example, in the effort to achieve understanding, the historian may be required to describe how a particular theorist defines and defends a particular conception of liberty or of human nature; then to explain how this conception relates to a particular argument about the desirability of or need for constitutional or absolute government; and finally to show how this argument fits and functions in the broader theory. Understanding and therefore political thinking are further enhanced by comparing the theories examined to one another, comparisons invited by conceiving each theory as instances of a common activity.

Creativity is involved in this process because the historian must illuminate, classify, and connect arguments and themes he feels are important and need attention. Perhaps the historian will invent abstract categories in order to highlight and analyze themes in theories which he feels might otherwise be missed or not fully appreciated. (Consider, for instance, Wolin's (1960) use of the categories "political space" and "time.") Or perhaps the historian will use suggestive labels in order to illuminate allegedly central arguments or themes in the works of particular theorists, as Strauss (1953, pp. 168, 193) does when he identifies Hobbes as "the creator of political hedonism" and Hobbes's theory as "the first philosophy of power." In these ways the historian introduces students to a new vocabulary and to different ways of thinking about political ideas, phenomena, and problems.

Understanding a theory also involves, and is enhanced by, critical reflection; this typically includes describing the supposed implications of concepts, propositions, or arguments found in a theory, and sometimes of the entire theory, for practice or for thought, and assessing these implications, and the theory and its parts, in terms of (for example) their supposed cogency, plausibility, novelty, justifiability, desirability, validity, truth, or falsity. Wolin's (1960, ch. 2) critique of Plato's political outlook as essentially antipolitical and Nelson's (1982, p. 43) cautious appreciation of Plato's "disturbing picture of democratic man," are examples. In these ways the historian as critic adds critical commentary as well as content to the theories examined, enlarging and enhancing the reader's comprehension of them and, at the same time, offering readers the opportunity to think critically about political concepts and arguments, relationships and possibilities.

This (second) defense of the traditional history can be summarized by saying that the critical analysis of the classics is itself an exercise in

political thinking or theorizing, an exercise controlled by the textual and other historical evidence available to the historian but not reducible to that evidence. Although it is true that this benefit is accorded the historian especially, the point here is that readers will be led to share in this activity. Exposure to the classics is in this sort of history a way of teaching students how to think analytically, systematically, and critically about political ideas, perspectives, and problems.

This defense is not mine; some version of it is explicitly made, typically in introductory comments, in most of these histories in order to strengthen the justificatory claim of relevance. Although some will fault this approach to past political theory on the ground that it inevitably leads to historical inaccuracies and distortions, I have tried to argue that such a charge is not only suspect (because the classics can bear these sorts of analyses), but also misses (or dismisses) the pedagogical utility of this approach for students of politics and political theory.

The Perennial-Issues Model

When he turns to the writing of a history, the perennial-issues historian focuses on the "timeless" political problems and issues in the classic texts. He thus presupposes both that there exist certain "enduring questions of politics," and that the study of the masters is particularly well suited to the task of ferreting out those questions—because, it is said, these theorists, unlike lesser political thinkers, "concentrated their attention on general principles." This is the position of Andrew Hacker, whose history (1961, pp. 17, ix) is prototypic of the perennial-issues model. Approximations to the model include Plamenatz (1963) and Bluhm (1965).

This historian's first objective, then, is to identify for students the eternal or persistent political problems, questions, issues, or even approaches to political inquiry found in the classics. He has, however, a second objective. Recognizing that discussions of these issues by the masters is often submerged in historically specific concerns, the historian tries to demonstrate that these discussions can be made applicable to contemporary political study or political life. This second objective requires another presupposition: that the historian can legitimately update or even reinterpret the ideas or arguments of the masters in order to make their language more familiar to students and their arguments more relevant for dealing with today's world.

Because the perennial-issues historian includes in his history only the masters, his work may be confused with that of the traditional history. There are, however, differences between the two. For one thing, the perennial-issues historian is less interested in elucidating the nature of political theory conceived as a complex or comprehensive activity and more interested in using the classics to identify the "perennial problems," the timeless "ideas and assumptions," or "the universal ideas" contained or embodied in them (Bluhm, 1965, p. 13; Hacker, 1961, p. 23; Plamenatz, 1963, p. x). Additionally, he is not interested in discussing the tradition of political theory and its supposed development; on the contrary, he explicitly eschews such an interest (Bluhm, especially pp. 14-15; Hacker, ch. 1; Plamenatz, especially pp. vi, ix-x). Finally, he is not interested in using the tradition to bring into focus some fairly specific contemporary problem or predicament such as the demise of natural right or the decline of the political. Rather, he wants to demonstrate how the many perennial problems, issues, ideas, and approaches to political inquiry explicit or implicit in the classics may be brought up to date and used to elucidate better contemporary political life and inquiry.

The pursuit of these objectives in the perennial-issues histories is of course intended to guarantee their relevance, to justify instrumentally the study of past political theory. More specifically, Hacker (1961, especially pp. vii-viii) argues that his approach will illuminate for students important (because perennial) political problems and ideas and in that way help to build a bridge between the study of past theories and the contemporary study of politics. Plamenatz (1963, especially p. xi) argues that his history will help students "look carefully at the assumptions they make and the ideas they use" because it is just such assumptions and ideas that the masters articulated and examined. In addition, Bluhm (1965, ch. 1) contends that his work will help students better understand approaches to the study of, and perspectives on, contemporary politics, because contemporary approaches and perspectives resemble in significant ways the approaches and perspectives found in the classics.

Because these instrumental defenses are quite straightforward and these histories (rather like the traditional histories) have been the object of numerous methodological critiques, I shall assume that the defense of this model requires primarily a defense of the two main presuppositions underlying it. The important queries here are: Do there exist timeless political problems? Can the task of bringing meaning up to date be defended?

The claim that there exist timeless political problems presupposes that there are inherent in all forms of political life problems that transcend time. As soon as we identify such a problem, we commit ourselves to the view that there are certain

ideas or concepts that are (to some degree) timeless. For example, if we say that "What is politics?" is a perennial question, we commit ourselves to the view that politics is a timeless concept. Only if we accept this premise can we say, for instance, that when Aristotle raised this question, he meant by it something akin to what we mean by it. This does not, of course, commit us to the view that the term "politics" never changes its meaning; on the contrary, we expect thinkers separated by time and space to define politics somewhat differently. Nevertheless, it does commit us to the view that the term in some respects never changes its meaning.

When radical historicists reject the contention that there exist timeless political problems or questions, they are committed to another view.[7] They suppose that a concept is individuated by its meaning, so that whenever a concept undergoes a change in meaning, it becomes a new concept (see Fain, 1970, ch. 2). They might argue, for instance, that since the Greek term for politics meant something peculiarly Greek, it cannot be supposed that the term has anything in common with ours, or that when Aristotle raised the question, "What is politics?" he was doing what we do when we raise the question.

Although I do not propose to resolve philosophical riddles concerning the nature of concepts, I wish to argue that the radical historicist view is self-defeating when applied to historical research. In particular, I want to suggest that the position of the radical historicist is, in two ways, radically ahistorical. First there can be, on the radical historicist account, no such thing as the history of "an idea"—such as the history of the idea of politics or, for that matter, a history of Western political theory—because the radical historicist would have us choose between two options: either ideas are individuated by their meaning, or ideas never change their meaning. The latter option is, of course, historically absurd; it would make history impossible. If, for example, the idea of politics never changed its meaning, there could be no history of this idea to tell.

[7] I have in mind Collingwood, Passmore, and Skinner. Collingwood rejected the view that there were timeless philosophical ideas in his *Autobiography,* as discussed by Passmore (1965, pp. 5-13). As Passmore points out, however, Collingwood also claimed that an exception to the radical historicity of thought might be political philosophy, a point on which Passmore also agrees. Skinner (1969), focusing specifically on political thought, transposes Collingwood's view on philosophy to political philosophy, although in the final analysis even Skinner is somewhat ambiguous on this point (in the 1969 article). A radical historicist position was also adopted by Lamprecht (1939).

The former option, however, produces the same result: if the idea of politics is individuated by its meaning, whenever the meaning changes the idea changes and, therefore, "there *is* no history of the idea to be written" (Skinner, 1969, p. 38). We could, on this radical historicist account, produce "a history of the various statements made with the given expression"; but this would not be a history of the idea, because ideas, unlike expressions or words, are individuated by their meaning. Writing a "history" (?) of the *expression* "politics" would, of course, be an "absurdly ambitious enterprise"; but, says the radical historicist, "it would at least be conceptually proper" (1969, p. 39).

Second, the position of the radical historicist—if taken literally—makes historical interpretation impossible. If historically distant or alien languages share nothing in common with our own, it is hard to see, as Dilthey (1962, p. 77) once suggested, how interpretation could take place: "Interpretation," he remarked, "would be impossible if expressions of life were completely strange. It would be unnecessary if nothing strange were in them. It lies, therefore, between these two extremes" (see also Wiener, 1961). If there is no similarity between Aristotle's conception of politics and our own, how could we say anything about his conception; indeed, how could we discover that he had any conceptions at all? Unless the historian is prepared to assume that there are some similarities, some resemblances, between his language and that of his subjects, historical interpretation must be given up and historical understanding must be considered impossible. It is doubtful that the radical historicist means to commit himself to such a position; and this helps to explain why Skinner had ultimately to retreat from the position just described (see Skinner, 1974).

There is, however, a related position that is both more common and reasonable, that of the historicist who fears that, in making the necessary assumption that the thought of the past shares something in common with the thought of the present, the historian will exaggerate these similarities and so fall into the trap of anachronism. Failure to take seriously the historicity of human thought and life may very well produce anachronistic interpretations and erroneous descriptions of past action or purpose. This danger is surely always present; it in no way follows, however, that this is necessarily a "bad" thing. Historians who turn to the past because of present-day concerns or interests may actually produce "good" history, by which I mean bring to our attention themes or dimensions in historical subjects or texts previously neglected or overlooked —and this because of their present-minded con-

cerns or orientation. Leslie (1970), supporting her case with some insightful examples, has argued precisely this point.

It is also important to recognize that the alleged danger of anachronism is easily exaggerated, since exactly what constitutes an anachronistic interpretation is at least sometimes difficult to say. It may, for instance, be anachronistic to call Plato and Rousseau "totalitarians," but is it anachronistic to call attention to those features of their thought that remind us of totalitarianism? The same difficulty affects the issue of "timeless" problems or questions. Although the current problems of conservation and resource management are indeed contemporary, the problematic relationship between man and nature has been a persistent concern throughout human history. Similarly, although the question of the appropriate role of technocrats in decision making may be contemporary, the question concerning who should rule seems to be timeless; the point, of course, is that answers to the contemporary query can be approached on the basis of answers given to the timeless query (or, if one prefers, the contemporary query is a version of the timeless one).

It needs also to be pointed out that perennial-issues historians cannot usually be accused of unwittingly making anachronistic interpretations, because they often admit to doing so. When the perennial-issues historian tries to bring the language up to date and make applicable the ideas and arguments of the classics, he is often fully aware that he is doing so and that he may, in the process, be distorting to some extent historical truth (e.g., Hacker, 1961, p. 16). Only intellectual historians outside the discipline[8] seem (or in the past seemed) to miss this obvious point; those within recognize that when a perennial-issues history is written by a political scientist, the author is out to save the study of past theory from feared extinction (as evidenced in Hacker, 1954, and Bluhm, 1962).

But one question does remain: Is the (typically explicit) objective of bringing meaning up to date legitimate? The answer seems obvious. As Hirsch (1972) has pointed out, all interpretive objectives are "ontologically equal" in the straightforward sense that there simply is no one interpretive goal or strategy sanctioned by divinity, logic, necessity, or any other authoritative ground. If the interpretive objective of the perennial-issues historian is justifiable on pedagogical grounds it is, therefore, legitimate.

Consequently, the only remaining way to critique the perennial-issues model is to attack not the objectives animating it but the justification underlying it. Two such objections, related yet distinguishable, can be identified, and both have been raised by Wolin, who once argued against this sort of history that:

> What seems to have been forgotten is that one reads past theories, not because they are familiar . . . but because they are strange and therefore provocative. If [for instance] Aristotle is read as the first behavioralist, what he has to say is only of antiquarian interest and it would be far more profitable to read our contemporaries. (1969, p. 1077)

The first objection raised here is that bringing the ideas of past theorists up to date misses their real significance, which is their "strangeness." This objection cannot, on reflection, be sustained. If achieving supposedly accurate interpretations of the thought of political theorists is worthwhile for contemporary students of politics, it must be because their thought is in some sense relevant. Now by "relevance" Wolin means their ability to provoke thought—a worthy, yet nonetheless present-minded, justification. If Aristotle could not provoke thought today, he would be found, presumably, irrelevant. But if one type of relevance can justify the sort of historical approach apparently favored by Wolin, surely another type of relevance can justify the approach favored by the perennial-issues historian. If Aristotle can be unfamiliar yet provocative, he can also be made familiar because provocative.

Wolin's second objection seems more telling. This objection is that the effort to make applicable or directly relevant the discussions and arguments of the masters puts the perennial-issues historian in the odd position of saying what could be said more economically or at least more directly. If, for example, the point of studying Aristotle is to launch into a discussion of modern behavioralism, why bother with Aristotle? Or if the point of studying Machiavelli is to launch into a discussion of modern theories of elitism, why not dispense with Machiavelli and deal with Pareto and Mosca?[9] The answer is actually quite simple: the perennial-issues historian does not focus on Machiavelli only to talk about theories of elitism. Machiavelli's ideas and arguments are relevant in numerous other ways; for instance, one might also find such directly relevant or applicable ideas

[8] In particular by Skinner (1969) who presupposes what is false: that the objective of the historical study of past thinkers is always the same—namely, the attempt to achieve historically "accurate" interpretations. He thus attacks Hacker on methodological grounds several times in the course of this essay, completely ignoring Hacker's objectives.

[9] Hacker (1961) uses Aristotle and Machiavelli in these ways; but see note 10.

as the meaning of political realism and means-end-analyses; the iron law of oligarchy; the tension between ethics and politics; the significanc of religious belief for political order; the doctrine of *raison d'etat*; various democratic ideas and problems; a cyclical theory of political change, perspectives on the limits of power; and political psychology.[10] For the perennial-issues historian, the thought of the "great" theorists opens an apparently unlimited storehouse of "relevant" ideas "which stimulate the mind and inspire the imagination" (Hacker, 1961, p. 19).

Conclusion

I have tried to defend three historiographical models, each representing a different approach to the study of past political ideas and theories, against the objections outlined in the first section of this article. Against the claim that historicist approaches are too past-minded to be of use or significance, I argue that histories using a historiography similar to that described by the historical model can on the contrary expose and sensitize students to a broad spectrum of important ideas. Examples include developing in students a sensitivity to the diversity of forms of political life and thought, and to the contestability of major political concepts and ideals; an awareness of the complex interrelationships between political thought and political practice; and an appreciation for the historical nature of political thought, inquiry, and practice.

Against the more general criticism that the study of past political theories is antiquarian, I have maintained that the process of historical interpretation requires creative and sustained forms of political analysis and reflection, that interpretation is not equivalent to mere description or re-description. I have also pointed out that the critical analysis of theories enables students to recover a way of thinking about collective or political existence which is unfamiliar, comprehensive, and often insightful; and that such analyses can contribute to the development of students' analytical, synthetic, and critical skills.

Finally, I argue that the perennial-issues history provides a direct, and anything but antiquarian, service to the student of politics by identifying and elucidating themes and problems explicitly considered, or implicitly contained, in certain old texts that nevertheless remain very much alive in contemporary political inquiry, thought, and practice.

[10]These are some of the "relevant" ideas besides elitism that Hacker (1961) finds in Machiavelli.

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