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CHAPTER 12

Teaching Comparative History of Political Philosophy

Eric Schliesser

The main aim of this chapter is to provide a conceptual framework that makes a more comparative, perhaps even global, survey course of the history of political theory/philosophy [hereafter HOP] possible.[1] At present, in political science and philosophy departments, there are survey courses in HOP that cover, roughly, works from "Plato to NATO." Such courses, and the survey texts they rely upon, are generally Eurocentric and mostly

The original version of the chapter has been revised. The correct acknowledgement text has been updated. A correction to this chapter can be found at https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-13405-0_17

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[1] Because of this focus I do not have a distinct section on teaching in this chapter. However, the chapter is based on my experience teaching a large introductory survey course in the history of political theory. In what follows, I presuppose a claim in the vicinity of the thought that "comparative political theory will be most coherent and most interesting with a focus on moral disagreement and justification across multiple distinct, semiautonomous traditions" (March 2009, 565). However, March is focused on research, while here I am focused on teaching.

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male dominated.[2] This chapter criticizes this status quo and suggests some of the means and obstacles toward a less imperfect HOP.

While one should not discount the significant role of custom and inertia, the existing curricular choices also tend to reflect a view that European modernity—say, the period from Hobbes to the American and French Revolutions—represents a decisive moral and political world-historical advance over the global past and is, thus, decidedly superior to other contexts from a comparative perspective. Even if one grants both of these points—as I do not—students (and their instructors) might benefit from learning about the ways these "advances" have been contested both then and since, and how they have been experienced by victims and critics of imperialism. In addition, there are by now familiar arguments about the benefits of epistemic diversity.[3] And, in the context of globalizing curricula and student bodies, exposing students to significant and even still vital intellectual traditions that present viable alternatives to European modernity can serve the instrumental purposes of recruitment and cultural enrichment.

While I assume that the primary aim should be to produce survey courses and texts in the history of *global* political theory, I'll articulate this aim in terms of a *comparative* political theory. A comparative approach, as I understand it, aims to "blur self/foreign binaries" in conceptualizations of political theory "and enable future innovation" (Jenco 2014, 658).[4] There are other pedagogical aims one might have in developing a comparative approach, including a better sense of the distinctiveness of inherited traditions[5] and having opportunities for viewpoint diversity.

To be sure, a comparative approach is by no means radical compared to the ambitions of what is known as a "decolonized" curriculum. Here, I use "decolonize" in the spirit of John Drabinski's definition, "the systematic dismantling of structures, habits, and values of racial-national superiority and, after, the proliferation of a non-centered sense of difference" (Drabinski 2020, 1). The comparative approach falls far short of the more radical political program of decolonizing, or at least reconciling, a settler-state (Tuck and Wayne Yang 2012).

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[2] The evidence for my claim is anecdotal. However, for converging, empirical evidence, see Bonjour et al. (2016) and Ackerly and Mügge (2016).

[3] In philosophy of science, the *locus classicus* is Zollman (2010). For a recent, judicious contribution, see O'Connor and Bruner (2019).

[4] I intend to echo here features of the post-colonial project of Young (2000).

[5] For an illuminating analysis, see Zarrabi-Zadeh (2015).

In particular, in a comparative approach one can teach many familiar concepts and arguments without aiming to eliminate these altogether. While a comparative approach may well agree with the decolonization approach that racial-national and gendered superiority should not be presupposed in the curriculum, a comparative approach does not necessarily and completely decenter a curriculum that contains such problematic elements. Rather, its point of view is shaped by context-sensitive inherited traditions and the need to teach certain concepts and distinctions that are used in a wider curriculum. In what follows I'll aim to speak with sufficient generality, but with awareness that local curricular, political, and even departmental cultures may differ quite greatly.

In the first section of the chapter I show with detailed textual evidence how existing secondary materials reflect clear and explicit biases against non-European and non-Christian political philosophy. I treat these textbooks as rough, inexact proxies for the status quo in HOP. In the second section, I discuss some of the methodological complications one may encounter in trying to develop a political theory course into a comparative survey in light of the assumptions of modernity. I distinguish between two ideal types—direct and indirect voice—that may orient one's thinking and also expose some of the tensions within and limitations of a comparative approach. In the conclusion I discuss a further conceptual obstacle, which I dub "modern historicism," as well as opportunities for developing a comparative curriculum.

12.1 The Textbooks

In this section I provide examples of two textbooks that exhibit egregious eurocentrism. By "eurocentrism" I mean points of view that leave unchallenged the universal authority of political ideas associated with modernity. The purpose of this section is to set up the arguments in the next section that a comparative textbook and curriculum allow for more genuine political and "viewpoint" diversity.

A few years ago, I was asked to take on a seven-week introductory survey lecture course on the history of political theory. This seemed like a good moment to take a fresh look at its syllabus. My helpful director of undergraduate education recommended I use Howard (2010) as a textbook. While reading it, I encountered the following passage:

> After the death of Mohammed in 632, Islam began a triumphant century of conquests. These victories, which left Islam the dominant force in the wealthy Eastern Mediterranean, destroyed what was left of the urban cultural base of the Roman Empire. (Howard 2010, 14)

The quoted passage is just about the only mention of Islam in Howard's book. The passage represents Islam as a powerful military force. It also treats it as destructive of and an antonym to "civilization." The contributions to political theory by Islamic thinkers, even with respect to European thought, go unmentioned. So, for example, even the thinkers inspired by Plato and Aristotle, the *falāsifa* (e.g., Al-Farabi, Ibn Bajja, Ibn Tufayl, Ibn Rushd), as well as figures like Ibn Khaldun, al-Maturidi, and Ibn Taymiyya go unremarked entirely.[6]

Judaism fares no better in Howard's narrative. It is mentioned in the context of early Christianity, and the characterizations of it are meant to convey the debate between and contrasting opinions of Judaism by Saint Paul and other reformist early Christians (who thought of Judaism as "philistine").[7] Saint Paul is presented as treating Judaism as the "dry religion of the law" (Howard 2010, 119). Jewish emancipation is mentioned, but not Jewish participation in it (294). While Muslims are treated as agents of destruction in Howard's narrative, Jews are, through their exclusion from the argument, not considered agents at all in his history of political theory; so there is no mention of Philo of Alexandria, who is one of the earliest extant advocates of natural equality (including gender equality) in political authority and an explicit critic of slavery,[8] let alone any mention of Maimonides, or, more controversially, Spinoza.

While "women" as objects of theorizing are mentioned frequently enough, individual women are almost completely consigned to the margins. This is a book without even an obligatory mention of Pizan, Wollstonecraft, or Queen Elizabeth I. Given the centrality of the French Revolution as one of the *termini ad quem*, it is especially curious that Gouges receives a single mention only in a footnote (Howard 2010, 351), and Grouchy is ignored altogether (Bergès 2018; Bergès and Schliesser 2019).

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[6] For a useful corrective, see Fraenkel (2012).

[7] These ideas have extraordinary longevity. See, for example, Franks (2010).

[8] See, especially, *De vita contemplativa* or "Of the Contemplative life." I do not mean to suggest that Philo is always this radical. There are plenty of works where he accepts various kinds of hierarchy, including slavery and gender hierarchy. For a useful introduction, see Engberg-Pedersen (1999).

The American Revolution is the other main destination in Howard's analysis; but the fact that there were "native inhabitants" is mentioned only in the context of Locke's ignoring them in his political philosophy (Howard 2010, 236; see also Young 2000, 245). So, while the Dominican order is mentioned a few times, there is no word of the monumental debate between Las Casas and Sepúlveda on the status of natives and the nature of human rights, let alone indigenous voices.[9]

A second survey text is the much longer and more sophisticated Ryan (2012). It, too, skips Chinese, Indian, Buddhist, and Indigenous political theory altogether.[10] However, it does have more to say about Islam. Here I focus on a remark in chapter 6, titled "Between Augustine and Aquinas," in a section revealingly titled, "Outside (Non)Influences" (212).

> The thinkers with whom we associate Islamic philosophy—al-Farabi, Avicenna, and Averroës—were interested in the metaphysics of Plato, Aristotle, and the Neoplatonists. Ibn Khaldun in the fourteenth century was perhaps the first Islamic political writer of a wider interest, and he depended on Aristotle for his moral and political views. He was, if the anachronism is permissible, an original political sociologist, among whose achievements was a persuasive account of what later became known as the theory of the circulation of elites, but not an original political thinker. (Ryan 2012, 214)

Ryan cites no authority. There is a quote from the eighteenth-century English historian, Gibbon, about Charles Martel on the preceding page. He seems simply unaware of the political philosophy of Al-Farabi, Ibn Bajja, Ibn Tufayl, Ibn Rushd, and so on, which are intrinsically interesting, but also shaped European thought (see Stone 2007). In the accompanying footnote, he gives the abbreviated title of one of Ibn Khaldun's works. This ignorance makes it possible to treat Montesquieu, Tocqueville, and Burke as the key thinkers of civic religion, even though Al-Farabi initiates a sociological and functional analysis of religion and its role in maintaining civil stability centuries earlier than these figures.[11] Ignoring Islamic political philosophy also means ignoring sophisticated analyses of the nature and function of elective monarchy (which can shed considerable light on the American and French presidencies today). Ryan's book also gives a curiously cursory treatment of Ibn Khaldun, who offers an account of the rise and fall of dynasties, an influential account of the social-psychological mechanisms of group solidarity, and a sophisticated analysis of the economic evolution of civilizations. In fact, Ryan is probably cribbing Gellner (1992, 10–13).[12]

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[9] For an example on the significance of this, see Sala-Molins (2006). See also the recent discussion by Romero (2020), as well as the essay by Alejandro Viveros in this volume.

[10] In order to illustrate the "flowering of faith" as a "result of the institutional separation of church and state," as "anticipated by" Tocqueville (and others), Ryan mentions that today the "United States is highly religious in the sociologist's, not the theologian's, sense [… with a] minority of Jews, Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, and animists among the population, there is a striking variety of Christian churches, including the hard-to-place Mormons, who belong to the Church of Jesus Christ" (Ryan 2012, 985).

There is also no mention of Maimonides here. In fact, in the paragraph devoted to the "Jewish scholars" of the middle ages, he writes: "the Jews of the Diaspora had little need to think about secular authority" (Ryan 2012, 214). He seems to miss that the absence of secular power is an excellent reason to think about such authority.[13]

A natural place to discuss the significance to European political thought, and modernity, of Islamic and Jewish medieval political theory is in the context of Spinoza's political philosophy. But Spinoza is mentioned only once, in the context of Hegel's metaphysics (Ryan 2012, 675). Philo of Alexandria is not mentioned anywhere.

Ryan does better on more recent anti-colonial, twentieth-century Islamic thought; he is clearly fascinated by Sayyid Qutb (Ryan 2012, 871–78). And it is not impossible that Qutb's polemical rejection of the Islamic philosophical tradition may have encouraged Ryan to treat it as a topic that can be safely ignored. (That cannot be the whole story because Ryan also recognizes that Qutb himself is being extremely inventive about the history of Islam.) It is a notable feature of his work that he attempts to engage with various postcolonial critiques by Fanon and Qutb (870–8); both are inscribed in a narrative framed by modernity, including a "history of colonization and humiliation" (878).

By contrast, Ryan does mention Pizan, who has an entire section devoted to her, and Wollstonecraft. Even so, his treatment is very partial. Let me quote a representative passage:

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[11] See, for example, Fraenkel (2012, chapter 3) and Parens (1995).

[12] One can also find the idea in Cahnman and Boskoff (1964, 51ff.).

[13] For a sophisticated introduction to medieval Jewish reflection on these matters, see Hovsha (2015).

> Christine de Pizan has become famous as the author of *The Book of the City of Ladies* and *The Book of the Three Virtues*, sometimes called *The Treasury of the City of Ladies*. We focus, not on these, but on *The Book of the Body Politic*. The more famous books are feminist manifestos, but not political in focus or purpose. They belong, as does Mary Wollstonecraft's *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* four hundred years afterward (though not her *Vindication of the Rights of Man*), to the genre of *la querelle des femmes*. (Ryan 2012, 295)[14]

One might charitably think that Ryan has some particular definition of the political, such that he is merely trying to be consistent here. However, I have been unable to find such a definition. But one can infer that by "political" he means something like "the contest and conflict of interests," on which both Pizan and Wollstonecraft have quite a bit to say. Moreover, he has long chapters on Plato and Marx, both of whom he explicitly (and repeatedly) treats as *antipolitical* thinkers. Also, other "manifestos" are treated with seriousness they deserve. In addition to the *Communist Manifesto*, Ryan singles out for praise, as a "manifesto" *On Liberty* (Ryan 2012, 706)!

Wollstonecraft is mentioned a few times in passing later (see Ryan 2012, 555, 622, 641). The cumulative gist of these four paragraphs is that Wollstonecraft wrote a famous text, *Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, that is, despite its explicit criticism of Rousseau, irrelevant to political theory, and she wrote another text, *Vindication of the Rights of Man*, that is relevant but not worth giving a brief summary of.[15]

Because Ryan is (seemingly) unaware of Philo and Ibn Rushd's political theory, he also suggests that nobody other than Plato drew the conclusion that political capacity and authority had nothing to do with birth and sex. That is to say, Ryan misses out entirely on the complex pre-history of feminism, leaving out many women (De Gournay, Schuurman, Mary Astell) and men (Toland, Mandeville),[16] and has remarkably little to say on the politics of the family (and its complex relationship to family planning and eugenics, leaving unmentioned its wide infiltration in much-admired and progressive thought).[17] To his credit, Ryan is more interested in anti-colonial work of the mid-twentieth century and writes admiringly of Fanon, in particular.

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[14] It is notable that Carole Pateman's *The Sexual Contract* is uncited, while her *Participation and Democratic Theory* is praised (Ryan 2012, 1052).

[15] For details, including his dismissive treatment of Harriet Taylor Mill, see Schliesser (2020). Arendt is treated, in passing, with more respect (especially in the notes). But a natural reading of the body of the text is that "totalitarianism" as a concept is now out of date and encourages muddled thinking (Ryan 2012, 916).

[16] For an analysis of what I call platonic feminism, see Lascano and Schliesser (2022).

Ryan discusses slavery throughout his work and explores its significance in many canonical works. Even so, he has no interest in abolitionism, and so ends up overlooking theoretically significant work by Condorcet, Gouges, Equiano, and Capuano on the complex political and economic relationships among mercantilism, imperialism, and slavery (Jeffers 2017a). What effectively happens in Ryan's text is that only once Europeans start exploring and conquering the world does his narrative expand out to paint on a global canvas.

12.2 THE CHALLENGE

In this section I analyze two ways within my comparative approach in which one might challenge the dominant Eurocentric narrative in HOP. One is to give direct voice to those who explicitly challenge and oppose the universal authority of Eurocentric political ideas either from within or without the tradition (hereafter direct voice). Another is to include traditions of thought that are not centered on, and often pre-date, European modernity and thereby implicitly decenter the tradition (hereafter indirect voice).[18] Both approaches have advantages, and both create, and are a consequence of, complex selection effects.

I discuss both approaches in light of a real risk diagnosed by Liam Kofi Bright: "I look at the stereotyped Non-western philosophy list and I can't help but notice another thing—it's a rejection of things that contemporary heirs to the Romantic tradition hate" (Bright 2019).[19] In context, Bright is discussing sympathetically works that typically are not studied by English-speaking philosophy students but which he has been canvassing enthusiastically. The features of these works he is discussing can be categorized as belonging in the philosophy of mind/metaphysics/epistemology areas; but the stereotypes he notices have a counterpart in political theory. So, amidst a diversity of style and outlook, here are two additional stereotypical features one is likely to find in typical lists of works of "non-western political theories."[20] First, in many of them the universal authority of Eurocentric reason is rejected in terms of parochial, local values embodied in (often invented or imagined) traditions. Second, despite the apparent rejection of universal claims, they usually end up saying pretty much the same thing: capitalism and imperialism are bad; egalitarian customs and institutions that celebrate communal life of mutual care, which reflect an authentic possibility, are good.[21] What is indeed striking about these two features—and I only noticed it after reading Bright—is that these reflect the program of *Romanticism*, or at least the part influenced by the popular version of Rousseau.[22]

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[17] He notes eugenics in the context of Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*, which is mentioned more often than Arendt, Wollstonecraft, and Pizan combined.

[18] Obviously, one may belong to a non-traceable-to-Plato tradition and be critical of modernity. But I treat that as direct voice. I thank the editors for discussion.

[19] The whole piece is worth reading.

Bright speculates that his reading experience may be due to a selection effect. To put his insight succinctly: there is a dominant "Enlightenment" narrative, and in it "non-western" readings are found to play out a dialectic familiar to European thought; such readings play a role that is, despite their more egalitarian tendencies, the functional equivalent of Romanticism and its legacy in the dominant narrative. And, indeed, a certain set of non-western readings helped shape Romanticism[23] and were subsequently shaped by it.[24] One of the clear effects of this dialectic is to flatten the "non-western" landscape and efface the heterogeneity within "western" traditions.

Keeping this in mind, let's turn to the two ways in which one can improve on the status quo. In shaping the curriculum it is tempting to attempt to correct the racism and imperialism of canonical texts by giving direct voice to those who challenge the universal authority of Eurocentric political ideas. Here the function of direct voice is to oppose. A progressive might even hope that the opposition is effective in creating an intellectual struggle in students and scholars alike that will lead to a kind of progressive synthesis in which modernity is transformed through the confrontation with the arguments and insights of its critics.

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[20] I dislike the terms "non-western"/"western" and the role it plays in analysis. But it seems fine to use it in context of this dialectic. The rise of "western philosophy" is itself tied to the rise of study of comparative civilizations in the late part of the age of imperialism and subsequent decolonization. See Schliesser (2022) for some data and speculation.

[21] Of course, this reductive presentation does no justice to a serious author.

[22] Graeber and Wengrow (2018) have been astute on this.

[23] See Graeber and Wengrow (2018).

[24] Fanon has a complex relationship to these issues (Bird-Pollan 2014).

Constructing syllabi involves choices under extreme scarcity (e.g., time and student attention) as one moves toward a more comparative perspective. This inevitably means sacrificing fascinating works of Europe's long, illiberal Christian and utopian history—so out go much of Aristotle, Augustine, Aquinas, Luther, Calvin, More, Burke, Paine, Saint-Simon, Fourier, Luxemburg, and so on, in order to make space for Equiano, Cugoano, Gouges, Grouchy, L'Ouverture, Douglass, Sojourner Truth, The Declaration of Sentiments, Du Bois, Ambedkar, Gandhi, Martin Luther King Jr., and so on.

One effect of giving direct voice in this way—and yes, that locution is intended to problematize my own position—is that it reinforces the idea that European modernity is, indeed, a decisive world-historical rupture and that all other voices must respond to it. One can recognize that racialized slavery, eugenics, patriarchy/misogyny, and imperialism are evils that shape our world and still note that the rupture-responsive model has its own flaws as a way to structure a curriculum. Effectively, the students are taught "liberalism and its heroic, egalitarian critics" (even if some of these critics are elitist in various ways, too; Jeffers 2017b, 252–53). Often, the critics of modernity draw on their own lived experience under imperialism, and the egalitarian and spiritual strains they derive from their (reading of) Christianity, Stoicism, Marxism, and Utopian anarchist/socialists.

Another route, and this exemplifies indirect voice, is to seek out exemplary thinkers of intellectual traditions untouched by the Platonic traditions or which impose a kind of intellectual isolation on themselves. (So, this involves both pre-modern and non-modern traditions.) I was first exposed to this when I encountered the curriculum of Singaporean liberal arts undergraduates.[25] One quickly ends up teaching some of the thinkers of the Chinese Warring States period (e.g., Mengzi, Mozi, and Han Fei) and Kautilya and/or Buddhist ideas.[26] There is a real risk here in reinforcing the idea (popular in the late nineteenth century) of "autonomous great civilizations" with their own distinct (illiberal and/or spiritual) political outlook. But this can be prevented if one teaches a multiplicity of voices. So, for example, I assign Mencius *and* Master Mo; or I present Kautilya alongside reflections on the significance of Buddhist monastic life. In addition, I tend to point out that Europeans became familiar with these traditions just as they started to articulate ideas associated with European modernity. I doubt it is a coincidence that Rousseau and Grouchy can sound a bit like Mencius sometimes.[27]

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[25] For more on this, see Schliesser (2017b).

[26] For a very useful textbook that can guide student and instructors into these waters, see Black (2016). See also Adamson (2016) and Adamson and Ganeri (2020).

I have, thus far, pretended that one can neatly separate direct and indirect voice. But the distinction is not always neat. So, in HOP I teach Al-Farabi (who is influenced by the Platonic tradition) and Al-Ghazali (who pretends not to be), and my students invariably think these are "non-western" and "pre-modern" and so, if we were to poll them, would classify them as indirect voice, whereas the way I use them in my course they can be instances of direct voice.[28] My motives to teach them also reveal some real-world complications. I think it important, especially in the Netherlands (where most students grow up functionally atheist), that revealed religion, theocracy, and political mysticism are taken seriously. And, given the public hostility to Islam (which is treated as synonymous with backwardness and barbarism), I want all my students to immerse themselves in extremely sophisticated discussions within it. That they encounter a version of platonic feminism is also a bonus.[29]

One advantage of indirect voice is that the defenders of meritocracy, hierarchy, empire, and honoring traditional rites all get their articulate say. I suspect this is one reason why some are so attracted to teaching Confucianism these days (Chan 2007; Bell 2012). This generates genuine viewpoint diversity and has the odd effect of simultaneously intriguing, and generating interest from, cosmopolitan and conservative/authoritarian students who feel that they are not just studying liberal ideology. Another attraction of indirect voice is that students notice that the post-Hobbesian social-contract tradition, with its telos—via Locke, Rousseau, and Kant (and possible critique by Hume)—toward Rawls, is just one possible strain of social-contract theorizing. For example, Master Mo has a very interesting account of the social contract.[30] A further advantage of indirect voice is that one escapes the quiet cognitive stranglehold of thinking about political philosophy in terms of self-sufficient states/nations and nation-states, which creates a relatively sharp demarcation between domestic and international political theory. What makes, say, Mencius and Kautilya fascinating to my students is that they treat domestic and foreign affairs symmetrically, and so they go really well alongside Machiavelli, Cugoano, and Marx.

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[27] On this, see, for example, Schliesser (2019).

[28] What this reveals is that direct voice need not be an author's intention.

[29] Lerner (2005, 58–9). I am not the first to notice this, see Bouachrine (2014, 10).

[30] See Schliesser (2017a). Once one is alert to it, one can find fascinating variants on the social contract in pre-moderns, Lucretius, Manegold, and Suarez (all of which I have used in exams).

Even so, in deploying indirect voice, one may end up treating European modernity as the only "tradition" worth having. In my course, for example, while students are exposed to alternative approaches, none are treated in depth or with much complexity. So while I introduce my students to consequentialist ideas via Master Mo, I also teach a module on utilitarianism through Bentham and Mill. And while I have quietly dropped Max Weber from my curriculum, I think it important enough that my students have some understanding of the nature of pluralism that I insert discussion of pluralism it in my treatment of Plato's "ship of state" metaphor. I accept that this makes my "comparative" approach by no means radical.

12.3 Concluding Thoughts

The conclusion of my last section hints at an anxiety. This is because while gesturing toward a globalizing curriculum, I may fall into a characteristic vice that I call "modern historicism." It is an unusual version of historicism because it is built on the (embrace and) reality of moral progress. Modern historicism is, in fact, committed to three claims: first, all thinkers are socially conditioned. Second, while we, too, will make socially conditioned moral mistakes, we are the products of moral progress or Enlightenment. Third, some mechanism of historical change, even improvement, is required. One often encounters explicitly modern historicism—say in debates over which statues to topple or renaming buildings and centers of excellence—when morally egregious positions/claims by a thinker of the past are partially excused.

But my present interest in modern historicism is due to the risks it poses to a syllabus in which modernity is the center of gravity alongside direct and/or indirect voice. For the modern historicist, not unlike her nineteenth-century predecessor, mistakenly and often tacitly assumes that previous cultures are organic wholes with a great deal of intellectual uniformity. And so she is likely to overlook that nearly all thinkers or historically situated concepts we might present, including the moral mistakes (or even sins) of the past, were often contested in their own historical context. We know this is true of the intellectual ferment of the Warring States period, as well as in the debates engendered by and among the *falāsifa*; but it is also true within European modernity. For example, Gouges is a great critic of feudalism and slavery, but *also* of democracy gendered male, which cost Gouges her head.[31]

Insofar as one has a duty in surveys of HOP to teach one's students the range of concepts and conceptualizations that are presupposed in liberal democracies, and the immanent or explicit critiques of them, one simultaneously risks reinforcing ideas of progress and, thereby, versions of modern historicism. This risk is especially present in direct voice because many of the concepts that are used to criticize modernity can be found within it (Lorde 2018).

Indirect voice is a very partial attempt to circumvent this problem. It can (but need not) promote a view that political theory involves learning to model fundamental trade-offs. For once one has an agnostic attitude about the normative commitments in the theories presented, one discerns that even political theories from cultures very far apart have had to make decisions about fundamental parameters pertaining to human nature (egalitarian or hierarchical), population, eugenics, gender relations, organization of property, and the mechanism of ruler selection, while building into them a limited number of fundamental aims (e.g., honor, wealth, power, justice, God's goodness).

It's possible, of course, that we are either on the precipice of the implosion of modernity, and that would allow much more adventurous decolonizing and decentering choices within curricula—that is, if there will still be universities like ours then; or, alternatively, our more adventurous choices might contribute to modernity's demise! But assuming not, there is, in fact, a clear choice lurking here between direct and indirect voice. Direct voice indirectly facilitates a curricular narrative of historical progress (or dialectic); indirect voice facilitates the idea that trade-offs are inevitable. Perhaps, however, this is a false choice, and we need both.

Acknowledgment I am grateful to the editors of this volume for their invitation and many editorial improvements. The usual caveats apply.

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[31] For one important article that explores the significance of this, see O'Neill (1998).

Recommended Readings

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