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The Scope of Comparative Political Theory

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Abstract

The article examines the emergence and implications of comparative political theory (CPT). It distinguishes theorizing based on travel and observation from that based on contemplation. Tracing the rise of the term CPT to 1997, it explains the academic, geopolitical, and cultural transformations that gave rise to some of the earlier work in the field. The acceleration of globalization also led to the rapid appearance of new intercultural and transnational approaches to political theory that move beyond the West. The article proceeds to analyze the methodological variety and alternatives within CPT work, arguing that we ought to take a broad, ecumenical approach to non-Western and cross-cultural theorizing rather than posit one single method as best. It presents two broad categories of CPT, one that is normative and another that is interpretive. The article closes by examining regional contributions in CPT, critiques, and supporting stances for CPT.

INTRODUCTION

Herodotus (2008 [c. 440 B.C.], p. 13), used the term *theória* (θεωρίης) when he described Solon's voyage away from Athens. He intended the word to mean the acquisition of knowledge through the process of traveling to "see the world." Gaining knowledge, in this view, is incompatible with sedentary, abstract introspection. It is a call to movement, but also a demand to sharpen our sensory cognition, especially through our sense of sight. This nomadic and aesthetic sensibility is at the heart of the original concept of theory (Euben 2008, McWilliams 2014).

Our modern understanding of theory could not be farther from Herodotus' vision. Even as far back as Niccolò Machiavelli (2010 [1513], pp. 109–10), the founder of modern political thought, we see an opposite view of theorizing:

> When evening has come, I return to my house and go into my study. At the door I take off my clothes of the day, covered with mud and mire, and I put on my regal and courtly garments; and decently reclothed, I enter the ancient courts of ancient men.

The paragon of secluded theorizing is perhaps Immanuel Kant, who famously never left his home in Königsberg while producing some of the richest and most influential works of philosophy, including ethics and political philosophy. In the twentieth century, that most famous of Kantians, John Rawls, led this line of thought to its logical conclusion: the elaboration of a theory of justice abstracted from the mud and mire of daily politics. It is a theory far removed from the travels and sightseeing of Herodotus. It has been a dominant model in the discipline of academic political theory since 1971.

Of course, the fact is that Machiavelli did acquire his insights and ideas by traveling. He was an emissary of Florence to a variety of courts within and without the Italian peninsula, and he wrote from a fundamentally aesthetic perspective (von Vacano 2006). Moreover, the mirror-of-princes literature in Europe was itself influenced by Near Eastern and South Indian traditions (Darling 2013). If there is indeed a Herodotean basis for modern political thought beneath Machiavelli's works, is it possible to recover it in a period heavily influenced by Rawlsian and Kantian analytical approaches to political philosophy?

One relatively recent development that has the potential to do so is the disciplinary subfield known as comparative political theory (CPT). Since 1997, this term has had an increasingly visible presence in discourse and debate about the nature, scope, purposes, and methods of political theorizing. At its core, it is a call to cross borders and travel—sometimes metaphorically, sometimes literally—to gain insight by looking at problems from perspectives outside the Western one. In this article, I assess the state of this approach to political theory. It is poised to be a major area of political theory because it provides a rare moment to reconsider and reshape the nature and scope of the discipline of political theory itself.

THE EMERGENCE OF COMPARATIVE POLITICAL THEORY

The first published use of the term comparative political theory was in Euben's (1997a) article "Comparative Political Theory: An Islamic Fundamentalist Critique of Rationalism."[1] The intellectual godfather of CPT, however, is Dallmayr (1997), author of "Introduction: Toward a Comparative Political Theory," who was pivotal in supporting the work of other scholars including Euben and myself. There is also a form of CPT *avant la lettre* in Parel's (1992) groundbreaking

[1] Euben first coined the term when writing her dissertation (R. Euben, personal communication).

Comparative Political Philosophy: Studies Under the Upas Tree. And scholars had long been using an intercultural history of ideas for pedagogical purposes (Salkever & Nylan 1994). Of course, there are also the older traditions of CPT, such as Avicenna's reading of Aristotle or studies of the same philosopher by Francisco de Vitoria in relation to the moral status of Amerindians.

Some critical disciplinary as well as geopolitical factors defined the juncture at which the term CPT first emerged. We may start from the self-evident: CPT is the product specifically of the political science discipline. Euben, Dallmayr, and Parel are all holders of doctorates in political science, not philosophy. There are certain affinities between CPT and other forms of intercultural theorizing (in fields such as anthropology, philosophy, history, and even English literature), and CPT borrows from other disciplines where its practitioners find elective affinities, but comparative political theorists bring those ideas home to political science.

The critical dimension is the rise of perspectives within Western academia that underscored the problematic underside of Western modernity. Situated mostly in the late 1970s, a variety of literatures in diverse fields built on the critical theory of Western Marxism and Foucauldian genealogical methods. In comparative literature, Edward Said's *Orientalism* (published in 1978) proposed that Western Orientalists, scholars of the Near East in particular, had created a simplistic misrepresentation of the Eastern Other on Eurocentric premises and under the mantle of imperial ideology. Likewise, the subaltern school of postcolonial studies borrowed from postmodernism, poststructuralism, and Third World Marxism to critique conventional Western approaches to development, modernization, and democracy (e.g., Stokes 1980, Chatterjee 1993, Guha 1997, Spivak 1999, Chakrabarty 2009, Kaviraj 2010). All of these perspectives were deeply skeptical of the reigning paradigms employed by Western academic disciplines. Comparative political theorists, too, have revisited the frame of the Western canon, from perspectives situated outside it, to show its underside; I discuss specific examples below.

The second factor affecting the development of CPT is the debate within political science about subfield relations. This involves political theory and the subfield of comparative politics. Some of the earliest work in CPT, such as Euben's (1999) *Enemy in the Mirror*, possessed clear linkages to comparative politics. In that book, Euben argued that comparative politics work on the rise of fundamentalism is too formal; it reduces the appeal of fundamentalist ideas to functional, material motivations rather than taking those ideas seriously on their own merits or even as ideology. In place of the conventional comparative politics approach, she focused on the thought of Sayyid Qutb in order to examine the rise of real-life foundationalist politics in a time when political theory had become on the whole antifoundationalist. Euben juxtaposed Qutb's critique of modernity with those of Western critics—Arendt, MacIntyre, Bellah, and Taylor—to show that the parallels prove that Qutb's views are not irrational or regressive but are another side of modernity.[2] Despite this important starting point in a critique of comparative politics, however, much of the work that goes by the name of CPT does not have clear connections to comparative politics. For instance, most of the articles in the influential anthology *Comparative Political Theory* (Dallmayr 2010) do not explicitly refer to methodologies, research, or concerns that clearly relate to comparative politics.

The third contextual dimension of the appearance of CPT broadly relates to the end of the Cold War and to globalization. As a result of the end of the Cold War in 1989, the role of Marxism in political theory has shifted dramatically. The prevalence of Marxism in intellectual circles in Germany, France, Latin America and other parts of the world receded throughout the 1990s

[2]Another example of this approach can be found in the analysis of the veil by Hirschmann (1997). Also see Euben's (1997a,b) focus on rationalism and modernity. In Indian thought we find examples in Mantena's (2012) treatment of Gandhian realism and Klausen's (2014) analysis of the phenomenon of anticolonial violence.

despite the absence of a clear nexus between Soviet political rule and Marxist philosophy. At the same time, a liberal triumphalism appeared on the scene with such works as Fukuyama's (1992) *The End of History and the Last Man*. In this book, Fukuyama argued that no other ideology or political philosophy could challenge liberal democracy after the fall of the Berlin Wall. Although simplistic and ultimately wrong—and indeed the 2000s have seen the widespread development of renewed interest in Marx—this thesis had a major impact in both policy and academic networks.

Concurrently, another stream of thought responding to the end of the Cold War had a distinctly pessimistic view. Huntington's (1996) thesis of the "clash of civilizations" laid out the view that the end of the Cold War meant that cultural affiliations, not political ideologies, would redefine the world into distinct civilizational blocs. Rather than convergence toward liberal democracy throughout the world, geopolitical conflict would ensue over incompatible cultures.

Both of these books, by Fukuyama and his teacher Huntington, were subjected to trenchant criticism, but they nonetheless had a deep impact on early CPT work. Euben (1999) makes reference to both to highlight how non-Western, religiously based political movements are seen by such thinkers as the antithesis of the rational, secular politics of the West. Similarly, Dallmayr's (1997, 2004) proposals for civilizational dialogue can be seen as a reaction and response to Huntington's pessimistic thesis. More recent CPT work, such as Godrej's (2011) *Cosmopolitan Political Thought*, is explicitly critical of the hegemony of particularly liberal ideas in the discipline of political theory. This stance can be traced to Fukuyama's impact on academic political theory in the 1990s, especially with the clear predominance of Rawlsian work in that decade in some of the major US institutions. At the same time, scholars such as Hashemi (2009) have worked to show that Islamic citizenship is compatible with the liberal, Rawlsian idea of overlapping consensus. In other words, although Hashemi disputes Huntington's thesis, he is arguing within the framework established by the Fukuyama–Huntington nexus. CPT's emergence is thus marked by the ashes of the Cold War.

METHODOLOGICAL APPROACHES AND ALTERNATIVE PARADIGMS OF COMPARATIVE POLITICAL THEORY

Three broad frames, then, have defined the rise of CPT: critiques of Orientalism, critiques of formal comparative politics, and critiques of the Fukuyama–Huntington theses. Yet the body of work produced by scholars working under the banner of CPT is diverse and cannot be said to coalesce into a single school of thought. The first frame—the critique of Orientalism—may be the most dominant, and as scholars have sought to develop alternative perspectives for understanding key political concepts by drawing on non-Western traditions, they have proliferated frameworks that might shape political theory.

Broadly speaking, there are two methodological approaches to CPT research: normative and interpretive. Normative accounts aim to achieve some moral end, although the specific content of that aim varies widely. Interpretive research intends primarily to broaden knowledge of political questions or issues, without an underlying prescriptive objective. The practitioner of the former acts as a guide; that of the latter acts merely as an interpreter. To be sure, there is overlap of these approaches in some paradigms of doing CPT, but I use the terms heuristically. Within each of the two approaches, we can identify four principal paradigms.

Normative Paradigms

For heuristic purposes, we can classify the normative paradigms as the dialogic, the justificatory, the democratic, and the anti-Occidental.

One of the earliest accounts of CPT, provided by Dallmayr (1997), offers a dialogic paradigm. It can be classified as normative because it is driven by the motivation to enhance communication among different cultural traditions in political theory in light of the world's becoming a "global village" (Dallymayr 1997, p. 421). Dallmayr (2004) also wants to unsettle the field of political theory, principally because it extends general models of politics throughout the world but these models are derived from Western experience. Dallmayr rejects the objective spectator model and favors the Platonic motto of *thaumazein*, or "wondering." The theorist must be modest but search for truth. Dallmayr also calls for a model based on the Latin term *imparare*, to learn. He proposes a "hermeneutics of difference" (1996, p. 39), also borrowing the idea of "diatopical hermeneutics" (1997, p. 422) from Raimundo Panikkar. He argues that interpretation or understanding is more complex when there is a distance between two independently generated cultural positions.

Thus, Dallmayr provides a cognitive and epistemic account of how to proceed in CPT. However, the aim is normative because "reciprocal questioning and critique" (Dallmayr 1997, p. 423) are expected to occur in order to enhance knowledge. Although the desire to create dialogue and more reciprocal communication is laudable from a moral point of view, it is not clear that an epistemic account would secure that outcome. At the same time, one worries that a dialogue between two historically unequal parties, that of the West and that of the non-West, does not start from a neutral ground for exchange of ideas (Black 2011). Then, too, the seminal influence of Dallmayr's intervention has generally led CPT toward a focus on the Islamic world, Indian subcontinent, and East Asia, to the exclusion of Africa, Latin America, and Oceania, and that focus sets the tone for a new, albeit unintended, privileging of the East in the CPT imaginary (e.g., Nederman & Shogimen 2008).

Some of the more recent interventions in the debate about how CPT ought to be carried out are also normative at heart and likewise underscore the idea of engagement. Andrew March, who offers an account of Islamic political theory in the present volume of the *Annual Review of Political Science*, has provided a thorough analysis of the methodology of CPT in the context of an argument about the terms on which conservative Muslims can live in non-Muslim states (March 2009a,b). In *Islam and Liberal Citizenship*, March (2009b) asks whether an overlapping consensus can be found between those principles attached to Islamic thought and those of a liberal state. Through rich discussions of the tensions between Islamic doctrines and Rawlsian as well as Habermasian conceptions of liberal citizenship (as well as within Islam), March focuses on what sorts of duties Muslims living in non-Muslim states have. He concludes that Muslims can have civic friendship with non-Muslims because Islam's foundations do provide a sense of solidarity with those of other faiths. This in turn provides support for the notion that political liberalism can be buttressed by doctrines that are not liberal.

March's (2009a) discussion of methodology has broad implications. For him, CPT faces a self-justificatory task: It must explain why it is needed, why it calls itself comparative, and what exactly it is comparing. Focusing on the term comparative, he argues that an "engaged" approach to CPT is the most cogent and that this view requires the adjudication of norms between "distinct and coherent doctrines of thought" (p. 531). March argues that political theory is largely a heuristic device and holds no single methodology as a *sine qua non* for its proper practice. Broadly, there are "scholarly" and "engaged" forms of political theory. The former centers on "whether we *understand well enough*" (p. 534, italics in the original) a text or phenomenon; the latter, which March favors, "is primarily aimed at investigating whether some sets of ideas are the *right ones for us*" (p. 535, italics in the original). For March, CPT is properly comparative only when the objects of comparison are relatively discrete and independently coherent. He therefore considers doctrinal religious traditions, which cohere around definite principles, debates, and institutions, the ideal type of object to be studied in CPT. Thus he writes: "It is clear how political thought

emerging from within religious traditions accounts for the comparative aspect of comparative political theory" (p. 552).

March's critical project is of great value. By questioning why we need CPT at all, inquiring about the meaning of "comparative," and providing a typology of both political theory broadly and forms of CPT more specifically, he pushes us to define the enterprise of CPT more carefully. Yet the insistence that work under the CPT label be internally "comparative" is a step too far. The fact is that much of the scholarship that expands our knowledge of non-Western thought is not comparative at all but is nonetheless able to contribute a great deal to studies of both Western and non-Western traditions. Some of this work is entirely within non-Western traditions [e.g., Dorraj's (1997) analysis of martyrdom in Iran]. Some of it makes passing reference to cardinal Western ideas or thinkers (Fox 1997), and only a subset actually deals symmetrically with two different traditions (Fernández-Díaz 1991). The work that is not internally comparative contributes to CPT by expanding the archive of political theory in ways that permit comparative readings.

The more significant problem with March's position is the argument that we do intercultural theorizing proper generally (or perhaps only) when we compare religious doctrines. March sets up an image of religious doctrines as somehow clearly coherent, well-delineated, and concrete in their shape. But religious traditions are not universally coherent and hermetic entities (see Godrej 2009). Catholicism, for instance, arguably the most doctrinaire of the Christian sects, shows deep syncretism. In Latin America, Aymara sun-worshipping religious traditions influenced colonial Catholic thought and practice, as is evident in artistic depictions of the Virgin of Potosí, Bolivia, in the sixteenth century (the image of the Virgin is superimposed on the silver mine of Cerro Rico with the sun radiating from her head). Religious traditions can indeed be the product of two or more widely disparate cultural influences. We cannot aver that they hold more coherence than other practices. The comparative stance is better justified by an orientation not toward rigidly distinct cultural blocs but toward cultural fluidity.

A third normative paradigm of CPT, espoused by Williams & Warren (2014), can be called the democratic variant. Neither Williams nor Warren is a CPT specialist, but they argue that the nascent field of CPT offers the possibility of creating new global publics that can enhance democracy at the transnational level. They thus pursue a globalization of deliberative democracy. Through translation across borders, there is an "architecture" (Williams & Warren 2014, p. 3) that promotes the formation of new publics across cultural divides. We are reminded of Dallmayr's notion of dialogue in Williams & Warren's idea that these publics become sites of communication. The authors critique global justice and cosmopolitan theorists for not taking cultural differences seriously. In their call for understanding CPT as a "practice of communication" (Williams & Warren 2014, p. 12), we hear echoes of a Habermasian conception of a democratic public sphere. This paradigm is analytic in the main but can also be found in research in the history of political thought. For example, London (2008) offers an incisive account of how to use close readings of early Arabic sources to expand democratic theorists' understanding of publics and counter-publics. This view helps us explain how people in nondemocracies can use certain forms of speech to speak politically.

The democratic paradigm is appealing precisely because it accords with a Habermasian discourse ethics. To the extent that Habermas' (1984) model—as well as similar ones, such as that of Benhabib (1986)—applies in intercultural milieus, this is a powerful paradigm. However, the conditions that it demands are quite exigent. As Williams & Warren (2014, p. 15) state, when "I speak or act, I entitle you to expect from me that which is implicit in my claim or action." This statement is unproblematic among equals or persons familiar with each other. It seems less cogent among strangers, who may have low degrees of trust due to low degrees of information about each other, and especially among strangers locked in political competition. In ideal speech situations,

ethical reciprocity prevails. In contexts of political conflict, it would appear likely that interests would trump duties of reciprocity. Moreover, the issue of words losing their moral power in some circumstances may be exacerbated across linguistic barriers, given that translation is hardly ever entirely accurate ("traduttore, traditore," as the saying goes).

The fourth normative paradigm is the anti-Occidental model. In a sense it is related to the democratic one because it seeks to build on the transnational phenomenon of late-modern globalization to democratize global politics with a turn away from Western hegemony. The emblematic exponent of this paradigm is Godrej (2011), with her account of a cosmopolitan vision of political thought. Like Williams & Warren, Godrej tries to imagine political theory at a truly global level, not constrained by national borders or obligations to respect state sovereignty. In her rich and eloquent book *Cosmopolitan Political Thought*, the duty of the political theorist is to "decenter" political theory away from its Western, European, and North American foundations. The thrust of her incisive critique is that the hegemony of what she calls "Westcentric" political theory discourse is ethically unacceptable. Borrowing many concepts from postmodernism, poststructuralism, and postcolonial thought, her critique focuses on the untenability of grand narratives, singular centers of gravity in theoretical work, and simplistic models of the self. In an age of postcolonial states, mass migration, and global communication, the limited and limiting Western canon unjustly excludes valuable voices from non-Western traditions. Again calling on a sense of engagement, Godrej asks theorists to become one with the ideas in the Other's texts. In the end, the theorist must undergo an existential transformation, and this will enable all sorts of comparative-theoretic couplings, such as thinking about parallels between Japanese and Latin American ideas or Hindu and African concepts.

I find this model useful if we want to understand, for example, the identity of emigrants and immigrants in multicultural contexts. They not only bring new ideas to their new lands but are themselves shaped by multifarious influences, even unconsciously. Where the anti-Occidentalist paradigm falters is in its imperative that Western political theory must be always decentered. It may be correct that we generally ought to provincialize the Western canon, but when some insights or Western thinkers do provide indispensable resources for specific theoretical problems, we ought to retain their centrality in that context. Moreover, it is unclear how the theorist can become one, at the existential level, with the ideas of a text.

Interpretive Paradigms

Just as we can identify four normative paradigms within CPT, we can point to four paradigms of interpretive or exegetical CPT. These are the scholarly, the phenomenological, the immanent-reconstitutive, and the conceptual-metanarrative. Heuristically, these models tend toward explication rather than normativity, although of course the distinction is permeable.

The most forceful case for an interpretive approach to CPT is made by Freeden & Vincent (2013). Their own prescription is this:

> [I]t is important to distinguish between the unifying prescriptive and ethical drive of what has come to be known as comparative political theory, particularly in the United States, and the interpretive drive predominantly pursued in. . .Comparative Political Thought. Understanding and decoding, rather than searching for or creating a new theory or a new language that transcends differences, is at the center of the latter project. (Freeden & Vincent 2013, p. 8)

For the two authors, who are not specialists in non-Western political theory, the normative approaches that I describe above are not the way forward. Their "Comparative Political Thought"

is at once more modest and more ambitious. It is more modest in that it does not aim to provide normative adjudication between diverse ethical positions within the literature. It is more ambitious because their decoding project aims toward a systematicity that borders on positivism's effort to make progressive steps in terms of knowledge accumulation regarding political ideas and phenomena.

Freeden & Vincent (2013, p. 2) see an underlying universalism to politics: "The crux of the matter is that when we study political thought in a comparative perspective, we study above all the nature of politics." Specific expertise in one region or culture ought to be seen as secondary to this interest in understanding phenomena that occur anywhere. A Weberian *Verstehen* of political patterns is possible. Moreover, we ought to be critical of monolithic conceptions of "the West," such as those of Godrej. In particular, they worry that the East–West divide is misleading and that postcolonial theory tends to essentialize cultures. There is, in reality, no "Western liberal democracy"; this is a fictional agglomeration made by theorists of different stripes. Methodology in CPT ought to be more rigorous, delving more deeply into comparisons as opposed to mere parallelisms. Units of analysis should be chosen more carefully, such as "concepts and conceptual configurations; discourses; arguments; ideologies and other belief systems; macrotraditions; or thinkers" (Freeden & Vincent 2013, p. 13). They argue that there is one best method, namely the comparison of concepts or conceptual concatenations.

There is much to be said for this approach, which I term the scholarly paradigm. It avoids the ethical imperatives of normative paradigms, which in some ways deviate from the main task of the scholar, which is to explicate. I would include Black's (2011) position under this rubric. Moreover, the critique of the East–West dualism is à propos. There is also cogency in the claim that postcolonial theory tends to reify cultures. Finally, Freeden & Vincent's method seems well suited to the study of an individual thinker in the effort to see how she or he thought. However, it is not clear that there is an evident nature of politics that is consistent everywhere. One may make certain localized generalizations, but they may not always hold. For instance, one could argue that race is an important element of politics. However, this is not true universally. The concept of race emerged around the period 1492–1500 and was not prevalent in ancient times. Moreover, it may not be as salient in some political contexts as in others. If this is the case, the desire to have a quasi-positivistic methodology of knowledge accumulation and progression in new CPT work may not be useful. We may be able to present particular interpretations of concepts and their concatenations, but this method will not lead to systematic classification of ideas.

A second paradigm within the interpretive family of approaches is phenomenological. Scholars working in this vein make an important political phenomenon the object of their inquiry. If the Western canon of political thought does not shed sufficient light on it, non-Western traditions can be analyzed to explain it, especially if the phenomenon at hand is more likely to occur in non-Western settings.[3] Euben's work on fundamentalism is representative of this paradigm. In her seminal *Enemy in the Mirror*, the main aim is to counter the structural formalism of comparative politics explanations of the rise of Islamic fundamentalism. These tend to see fundamentalism as a product of economic or political exclusion, whereas Euben argues that ideas themselves matter. In this light, Islamic fundamentalism results not from material or civil deprivation but from an attraction of actors to meanings, values, and foundational concepts that critique Western modernity (Euben 1999).

[3] Euben's (2008) analysis of the relevance of travel to theorizing is an instance of this paradigm. Hashemi's (2009) examination of the relationship of religion to democracy, very different from March's justificatory model, is another case of phenomenological CPT. Khan (2006) examines democratic theory within Muslim thought.

We can call this paradigm phenomenological because it selects an important phenomenon even if the term for it is not prevalent in its cultural context. For example, there is no word for fundamentalism in Arabic. *Usuli* was coined to fit the English term (Euben 1999). In other words, what matters more than terminological genealogies is an interpretation of why a certain process or movement happens to gain power and appeal.[4] Within the phenomenological paradigm, Euben seeks to explain modern Islamic fundamentalist philosophy on its own terms rather than to judge whether it is normatively acceptable. By choosing the phenomenon of fundamentalism, Euben is not endorsing the movement, but neither is she rejecting it out of hand. This is a crucial strength of this paradigm, for it allows deep intellectual engagement with an important political problem.

Responding critically to the early wave of CPT work by scholars such as Dallmayr and Euben, Jenco (2011) has developed a third instance of a non-normative, interpretive approach. Hers could be called the immanent-reconstitution paradigm. Faulting Euben as well as Godrej for not going far enough toward a "radical" (p. 3) reconstitution of political theory, Jenco believes that Euben's work is largely about examining unusual case studies from the vantage point of mainstream political theory, and she criticizes Godrej for seeking merely to "enhance the discipline's capacity for self-reflection" (p. 32). Both models, in her view, preclude the likelihood that non-Western traditions can be used to destabilize ossified methods and practices within mainstream political theory. Jenco calls for a reconstruction from within of the entire political theory discipline through a "recentering" (p. 42) process. Through immersion in local cultures, appreciation of the indigenization of learning, and replication of non-Western hermeneutic techniques, political theorists can and ought to reconstitute political theory—not only its substantive ideas but also its practice and methods. Explored in this way, "local" sites of (non-Western) knowledge production can become "mobile" (p. 49). Jenco examines the work of Chinese classicists Wang Yangming and Kang Youwei to show that their hermeneutic practices are distinct from the logocentric Western tradition and argues that political theory ought to incorporate such non-Western methods of political theorizing because they would help generate a holistic reconfiguration of political theory.

In this radically ambitious paradigm, the critique that most CPT work is actually grounded in some form of Western philosophy is cogent. Postcolonial theory insists that European frameworks are evident the world over, and we see European bases such as Marxism and poststructuralism at the heart of some CPT work. Jenco is also correct to say that often non-Western ideas are explored to see what they can tell "us" Westerners, not for their own sake (she refers to Ackerly 2005).

Jenco argues for a deliberate supplanting of some central Western methods by non-Western (specifically Chinese) ones, such as Wang's "study of the mind-and-heart" (Jenco 2007, p. 746) and Kang's "study of the classics" (Jenco 2007, p. 750). The examination of Zhang Shizhao's making of the political at the individual level (*ren*) is an instance of the reconstitution of democratic theory on new foundations, which provide an alternative to the generally collectivist (*qun*) approach of democratic theory as well as a vision for countries where democracy is in crisis (Jenco 2010).

In my view, Jenco's immanent reconstitution of political theory is a fruitful paradigm when we critique parts of the Western mode of political theory, such as its insistence on positivistic systematicity or logocentrism. Yet her greatest aspirations are probably unrealizable. The immanent-reconstitution approach aims for cross-cultural theory, but the threshold for entering its debates is very high. In order to understand another culture's complex processes properly—and to verify whether a claim made within any given theoretical debate is correct, partly correct, or wrong—one

[4]Euben refers occasionally to Dallmayr's dialogic paradigm, but her focus is on phenomena. One example of this approach is *Beyond Nationalism?*, edited by Dallmayr & Rosales (2001). Another is *Race and Reconciliation in South Africa*, edited by Van Vugt & Cloete (2000). *Democratization and Identity* focuses on ethnicity in Asia (Henders 2006); affect in Confucian thought is explored in *The Politics of Affective Relations* (Bell & Hahm 2004).

must achieve linguistic, behavioral, and even personal transformation. It may be desirable to learn about alternative methodologies, but it is not clear that the current methodologies of Western political theory are entirely inadequate. If we "recenter" political theory, what is the new point around which we ought to recenter? Without elaboration, Jenco seems implicitly to recommend a Sinitic center. But even given the rich intricacy of the many Chinese traditions Jenco examines, it is not clear how the "mind-and-heart" method, for example, would be of use to a West African, Andean, or even US theorist or practitioner of politics.

The final paradigm within the family of interpretive approaches is what we may call the conceptual metanarrative approach. My work on the role of race in the making of citizenship in Latin American political thought is an example (von Vacano 2012). Although the project is framed broadly in terms of the relevance of race for contemporary times, the exegesis of the place of race in the writings of some canonical thinkers in the Latin American tradition is fundamentally explanatory. In this work, I argue that a particular concept, race, has had special salience in the construction of civic membership in societies characterized by high degrees of ethnic admixture. Thus, the focus is on a concept rather than a specific phenomenon per se ("race" does not exist as an objective reality). The argument is a metanarrative because it proposes that race must be located within the grand discursive arc of modernity but then disarticulated into central moments or periods. Although I share the critique of the Western tradition (I object to a domination paradigm of race that sees "nonwhites" as generally inferior to "whites"), I nonetheless make use of it where it is useful. Thus, I employ a derivation of Hegelian history of ideas to frame my argument. I contrast one particular line of thought within Latin America to the US dualistic view of race. The claim is that concepts such as *linaje* and *raza* used in the late fifteenth century were the basis of the first case of racialization as described by Bartolomé de las Casas. This narrative is built on a set of arguments that posit conceptual continuity despite vast historical distances over *la longue durée*, constructing a synthetic view of race as mixed and fluid, not fixed and rigid.[5] The hermeneutic approach is largely exegetic; it examines core texts that are canonical in the Latin American intellectual tradition. And the strategy is to choose one concept that is not properly understood if we use only a Western European approach to its study.

It may be cumbersome to think of work in CPT as being characterized, loosely, by four different normative paradigms and four different interpretive paradigms, but that fact is itself a testament to the high degree of variation of approaches within this subfield. This variation permits a remarkable enrichment of the kinds of scholarship available to political theorists. The following section details specific areas where I think CPT is presently making, or can make, its most significant contributions.

AREAS OF REGIONAL CONTRIBUTION

Within each major area of regional CPT, there are important issues and problems to address that would shed light on particular as well as broader topics in political science.

In Islamic political theory, I believe there are four major issues that can be considered salient both for work within the tradition and for CPT more broadly. The first has to do with the role of experts in the law. In a government that includes a popularly elected legislature, where do we institutionally locate the experts' authority? What is the role of tradition vis-à-vis experts' rule? Thinkers to consider here include the Ayatollahs Muhammad Husayn Na'ini and Ruhollah

[5] Other examples of this paradigm are in the study of the concept of "the people" in Latin American political thought (Ochoa Espejo 2012), which also contributes to democratic theory; and of the concept of the "state of nature" (Fox & Carlson 2013).

Khomeini. A second set of questions has to do with the relationship between the rule of law (where law can be religious, secular, or natural) and the command of the sovereign. A wide variety of thinkers contribute to this realm, including Platonic and mystic philosophers such as al-Farabi, Ibn Sina, Suhrawardi, Ibn al-Arabi, and Mulla Sadra; medieval/early modern theorists of political authority such as al-Ghazali, al-Mawardi, and Ibn Khaldun; early modern and modern Shi'ite jurists such as Mulla Ahmad Naraqi, Sayyid Ja'far Kashfi, and Muhaqqiq al-Thani; and scholars who write in the tradition of religiously legitimate discretionary authority, such as Ibn Taymiyyah. A third issue has to do with the role of the masses: Does popular consent legitimize government, and if so, why? For this question, the work of al-Ghannouchi (1993) and Soroush (2000) is valuable. Fourth, how do Islamic political theorists build a boundary between the public and private domains? Contemporary scholars such as Abou el Fadl (2004), Sachedina (2001), as well as al-Ghannouchi are useful here.

For East Asian political theory, three questions stand out. One is the practice and theory of political meritocracy. Scholars are exploring alternatives to the democratic institutions that are at the center of the Western view. The work by Bai (2012), Chan (2013), and Bell & Li (2013) is central to this debate. Moreover, given the demographic explosion in East Asia, the city as a site of identity and self-determination is equally important. This topic leads to some core democratic issues, such as the proper scale of a democracy; it can be related to the classical Greek idea of the *polis* in comparative perspective. Wang (2009) and Cui (2012) are important thinkers in relation to this topic. Last, political culture and its relation to foreign policy is a central concern. Yan (2013) is someone who sheds light on this problem.

African political thought is generally neglected by Western scholars. In this field, four areas of research need further exploration. One is the concept of citizenship for African states and how citizens may be able to have some control over state power. Mamdani (1996) addresses this issue. Second, the extent to which political structures can be made more democratic is a major question. Wiredu (1996) and Ayittey (2011) are key thinkers in this realm. A third issue, which has theoretical relevance for other areas of the world with large indigenous populations in a postcolonial setting, has to do with the potential and the limits of traditional/indigenous ideas in relation to modernization and some aspects of liberalism, such as the work of Ateh (2013). Lastly, the issue of "leadercentrism" in African states, which has affinities with Latin American *caudillismo*, is examined incisively by Wingo (2003).

Eastern Europe is often seen as the periphery of Western civilization. However, it has its own dynamics and intellectual traditions. Some normative questions relevant to this region are: Is a culture of acceptance of opposition possible, and can it be promoted? Is a cohesive sense of nationalism or national identity necessary for a functioning democracy? As Rutland (2009) argues, the architects of Eastern European democratic transitions often assumed that protecting individual rights and freedoms was sufficient, that a communal identity as citizens without an ethnonational core would be enough. But political experience in the last two decades has thrown these ideas into question. A broader problem, according to Rutland, is that corruption is endemic and may be insuperable. Almost all new democracies (not just in Eastern Europe) show high levels of corruption, which is often tied to populism. Examining the links between corruption and populism may have deeper implications for other parts of the world, such as Latin America.

In the field of Latin American political thought, I would highlight three principal areas of research that come out of recent political theory in the region. The first is the re-emergence of various stripes of democratic socialism. While left-leaning ideas were on the retreat in the United States and Europe (until a very recent resurgence), a wide variety of "socialisms" appeared in Latin America. From the indigenous/modernist syncretism of Evo Morales and Alvaro García Linera, to the pragmatism of Lula and Dilma Rousseff in Brazil, to the progressive ideas of José Mújica

in Uruguay, it is clear that (contra Enrique Krauze) not all of the Latin American left is either "populist" (in the mold of Perón) or "radical" (in the mold of Castro). Examining the normative and theoretical distinctions among these regimes and their popular support is a central area for further work in CPT because many of the ideas related to these governments are influenced by European, indigenous, and even postmodern concepts. A second area is the related process of the formation of relatively coherent regional blocs that pose alternatives to Western European and US models of democracy. Whether there is cohesion among these disparate left-leaning regimes is the central question, especially given the unique position of Brazil, situated as it is among Spanish-American states. Last, the emergence of progressive ideas such as indigenous rights, women's political participation, ecological policies, gay rights, and others in the context of largely nonreligious politics is a phenomenon from Latin America that may be relevant to other parts of the world where inequality and tiered citizenship exist and religion plays a central political role. All of these questions must be approached with further research in the history of political ideas in the region in order to examine what makes them unique vis-à-vis other regions. Recent work by Palti (2010), Gargarella (2013), and Aguilar (2012) combine attention to historical complexities with concern for contemporary problems in the above areas.

Indian political theory, much like Western political thought, has a historical component and a more practical, contemporary component. The historical component is largely concerned with Gandhi's legacy and his thought. Parel (2007) outlines how Gandhi drew from both the Indian philosophical tradition and Western thought in order to found modern Indian political theory. But Mantena (2012) and Mehta (2010) ask us to interpret his legacy critically. Was he a political thinker? Was his relationship to the West one of fruitful dialogue and creative reinterpretation (Parel's position) or rather a fundamental challenge of the premises of political organization (Mehta and Mantena's)? Parel argues that Gandhi incorporated Western ideas into pre-existing Indian canons to create something better. Mehta and Mantena underscore fundamental incompatibilities between Gandhi's thought, especially his doctrine of nonviolence, and the Western conception of the state, especially as it is attributed to Hobbes and Locke. Furthermore, Mantena's interpretation challenges what she perceives to be an overall consensus that Gandhi was a moral idealist. In Mantena's reading, Gandhi was a strict, demanding realist. In Mehta's he was simply not concerned with the political.

The contemporary dimension, on the other hand, is focused on the Indian constitution and its relationship to minority and religious rights in India, sometimes in contrast with the West. Because of the great diversity of religious affiliations in India, Bajpai (2011) and Bhargava (2009) argue that India came to reject the Western separation of church and state in favor of a model where all religious groups are viewed as equally part of the state, without giving priority to one over another. To Bhargava, this is, in part, a manifestation of a distinctively Indian political theory that is open to the West without accepting the totality of Western political theory. Bhargava and other scholars in the same vein are also concerned with the successes and limitations of the Indian constitution. Much of the work in Indian political theory is concerned with secularism. All authors want to contest the thesis that secularism (particularly in relation to Islam) is impossible in India and in Pakistan. To Iqtidar (2011), however, this necessitates a thorough rethinking of the relationship between Islam, secularism, and secularization, for Western approaches to the problem are not suited to the religious politics of the region.

CONCLUSION

Not everyone thinks CPT is a good thing. Some have argued against it on the grounds that traditional political theory, especially the history of political thought, has always been comparative.

Others, often following Leo Strauss, argue that the discipline known as political theory is fundamentally a Western enterprise. From the time of Socrates and his followers, Plato and Xenophon, we see the birth of a systematic, self-referential (i.e., disciplined) approach to political ideas. This tradition is of necessity concatenated, for it is built on schools of thought in which students refer to their teacher's ideas and modify them. A third argument proposes that the use of labels such as "comparative political theory" hinders intellectual progress by generating excessive fragmentation. The proliferation of a model based on the area studies perspective, with specialized expertise required for engagement with each area, leaves scholars unable to communicate across their specialties.

Political theory is indeed essentially comparative, broadly speaking, because ideas are always judged by comparison and contrast to other ideas. But the academic discipline of political theory in general—and especially in the United States in the last 40 years or so—has remained static and excessively self-referential. To take one example, the publication of John Rawls' *A Theory of Justice* in 1971 in a sense narrowed rather than broadened work in political theory. Galvanized by the insights and originality of this magnum opus, subsequent academic political theorists delved deeply into its arguments and ideas. Mining its rich veins, they neglected other, especially non-Western, traditions. Rawls' theory is itself not particularly comparative: It is a normative model that derives constitutive political principles from an abstract, deontological perspective. Comparisons are not essential to its aims, and especially not cultural comparisons. The dominance of Rawlsian approaches means we need to proactively revive the comparative spirit of political theory.

With regard to the claims for the pre-eminence of Western thought, the best answer is simply to point to alternative traditions that are equally endowed with insight. It may be true that the US-based discipline of political theory owes its sociological genealogy to European and ultimately Ancient Greek models of academic learning. But to focus on the Western European tradition without any knowledge of, for instance, Islamic or Chinese political thought is myopic. These two traditions' wealth of knowledge is too deep to rehearse here, but to claim that thinking about political phenomena is only a Western practice is inaccurate. The concern about fragmentation presents a challenge for practitioners of political theory. I believe CPT should involve non-Western ideas or thinkers, not merely the application of European ideas in non-European contexts. My hope is that the framework I've laid out above will help scholars of CPT to find conversational points of contact that permit them to bridge their distinctive specialties.[6] The last and strongest reason to defend CPT is that many problems in political theory are not properly addressed by using only canonical, especially Western European, traditions. For example, most thinkers in the European tradition tend to hold a domination paradigm of race, one in which European "whites" were seen as superior to "nonwhites." Even eminent thinkers such as Kant and Hegel saw those of African or Amerindian descent as not fully human and incapable of creating a civilized culture. If one is to have a more complete and less closed-minded view of racial identities, one would have to choose alternative intellectual traditions. The Latin American tradition, for instance, offers rich resources here, as I have indicated above. Beyond the role of race in politics, other issues that require study from outside the Western tradition include religious fundamentalism, intercultural overlapping consensus, modalities of toleration, and how individuals shape political action.

Finally, new questions are emerging in the political sphere of late modernity, and it is not clear that the resources of the Western tradition, on their own, are adequate to address them. The mobility of capital in the information age makes national sovereignty more precarious; the

[6]Jahanbegloo (2012), Souza & Sinder (2007), and Keyman (2007) also provide country-specific examples of culturally rich approaches to political theory problems.

migration of massive numbers of people from one state to another makes borders more porous; the proliferation of individuals with multiple nationalities undermines the idea of singular citizenship; and individual identity is reshaped by processes such as emigration and deportation. The modern faith in reason that shaped secular constitutionalism is shaken by religious fundamentalism, while emerging global powers vie with established ones (such as China and Russia vis-à-vis the United States). The politics of the early twenty-first century pose a serious challenge to Westphalian models. Political theory has generally assumed that state borders are secure and sovereignty over a territory is stable. But this view cannot easily be defended under the pressure of these new phenomena. As politics change, political theory must adapt to new global circumstances.

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