

BETWEEN POLITICAL HISTORY AND HISTORICAL  
POLITICS: FUNDAMENTAL FORMS OF HISTORICAL  
AND POLITICAL LITERACY

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Politics without history has no roots; history without politics bears no fruits. If one inquires into the content of the relation between politics and history, then one discovers it is defined by symbiotic dependence. Those who are trained in history also take into account the political dimensions of history, and those educated in political science cannot neglect the historical factors inhering in current issues and problems.<sup>1</sup> The fact that politics is part of history and vice versa has always been significant on both a theoretical level and in the practice of teaching history and politics.<sup>2</sup>

Currently, the relation between the teaching methodology applied to history and politics receives significant attention from the historical side<sup>3</sup> but is only seldom referred to from the political perspective.<sup>4</sup> Nevertheless, at the present time there is no explicitly delineated educational approach that integrates the teaching of both of these disciplines. This article is an attempt to advance an approach that places historical and political learning in the field of tension spanning political history and historical politics.

The first aspect to be explained is the development of the cooperation between historical and political teaching methodologies. Extrapolating from this, it is assumed that the object of historical and political education can be described as an area of correlation, in which two forms of knowledge mutually affect one another. The particular, basic categories are introduced along with imparting an awareness of history and politics. These categories can be understood as sub-systems of an attuned consciousness of society.<sup>5</sup> The imparting of meaning to history and politics becomes entwined in the awareness of history and politics. The learning of political history and historical politics can thus be identified as the two basic forms of historical and political learning.

## The Changing Cooperation in the Educational Approach to History and Politics

In the teaching methodologies applied to history and politics, there have been efforts on both sides to integrate the other form of knowledge (and thus the other subject as well). For a long time, the subject of history laid claim to the educational space in which politics was taught. Seen through the lens of developmental psychology, it was doubted whether students could even acquire a basic knowledge of the political sphere. This assumption justified the central importance assumed by history for teaching about politics. This was the case because examples taken from political history were regarded as a "secondary field of learning," in which political thought and practice could be comprehended.<sup>6</sup> The historical integration model dominated the teaching of history and politics up through the 1970s.<sup>7</sup>

The political integration model assumed increasing importance due to the rise of the social sciences. It was assumed that history could be adequately learned from the historical aspects of current political events. By studying the historical development of and through the reflection on historical analogies in light of current political issues, the study of politics implies historical thinking such that history is no longer considered necessary as a separate discipline.<sup>8</sup>

At the time, the possibility of integrating "the study of history into social studies"<sup>9</sup> or combining "civics and history"<sup>10</sup> dominated the discussion concerning historical and political education. This development caused a public uproar when the "Hessian Guidelines for the Teaching about Society" was published in 1972. History was now supposed to be legitimated by "proof of its relation to relevant sociopolitical problems."<sup>11</sup>

The integration model (in its historical and political forms) reduced the one subject to an aspect of the other. The historical-political thus was subjected to the hegemony of the educational approach of either history or politics. Certain efforts in these models should be recognized as conceptualizing historicalpolitical education as the sum of both the historical and political fields of learning. Thus, historicalpolitical education is based on the independence of two means of questioning, which can both offer a contribution to the knowledge of social reality.<sup>12</sup> The cooperative model of historical-political education acquired more influence in North Rhine-Westphalia in the *Unterrichtsfach Politik* (Teaching Politics) (1973) and the *Richtlinien Politik* (Guideline for Teaching Politics). In the course of this development, the traditional content of the canon was put on the defensive. History and politics now cooperate, which is a benefit to the interdisciplinary curriculum concept.<sup>13</sup>

The future of historical studies is jeopardized by its being subordinated to a sociological or political science perspective or by its absorption into an interdisciplinary curriculum.<sup>14</sup> It was only in the course of the 1970s that historical education gained new self-confidence, which is reflected in the discussion about historical-political collaboration.<sup>15</sup> The fundamental aspect of this was the category of historical consciousness.<sup>16</sup> Since then, historical education has been understood as a scholarly discipline "that dwells on the education and self-education processes, as well as the teaching and learning processes on and through history, and thus discusses the formation, state, function, and influence of historical consciousness within social and historical contexts."<sup>17</sup>

Based on this disciplinary foundation, the collaboration with political education was also re-thought. This increased the significance of the correlative model of historical-political education. It not only juxtaposed the historical and political perspectives but also made them mutually interdependent. The historical is viewed as a component of the political and the political as an aspect of the historical.<sup>18</sup> Nevertheless, these perspectives do not perfectly complement one another. Thus, the coordination of both areas of learning is a primary task. More often than not, there is a mutual enrichment to be found in the content and theoretical interests of a social science-oriented historical form of education and a historically-oriented political form of education.

If the focus of historical and political education is in a field overlapped by both perspectives, then it is sensible to explain the respective disciplinary objectives of political and historical consciousness. In historical education, the category of consciousness occupies a very important position. Historical consciousness has become a key concept of the discipline, enabling the subject to overcome the crises of the sixties and seventies and to integrate perspectives from various fields. In political education, the discussion of political consciousness failed to develop a comparable dynamic.

#### Historical Consciousness

Historical consciousness denotes the capacity of the mind to view current social formations in the context of what has occurred over time. Moreover, "the concern about the future should be understood as an essential factor that motivates the education and formation of a historical consciousness."<sup>19</sup> The category of historical consciousness directs the focus of historical education to the "context of interpreting the past, understanding the present, and anticipating the future."<sup>20</sup> In this way, history is freed from a fixation on the past and can be viewed as a

thinking activity applicable to the present. The uniqueness of "historical consciousness" no longer then lies in an effort to "know the past but to recognize the time-contextualization of the past, the navigation of which is determined by "an interest in the future."<sup>21</sup> The foundation of historical thinking thereby extends beyond the past and is connected to the present and future.

In this general form, historical consciousness can be described as an ensemble of "ideas about the past."<sup>22</sup> This enables the category to encapsulate the notion that history is not defined as the reconstruction of past reality; "it is also the *representation* that people are constantly making of it."<sup>23</sup> Generally speaking, historical consciousness denotes the ability to orient ourselves in dealing with the temporal changes of our lives and our social reality.<sup>24</sup> Memories of the past are interpreted to put life in perspective.

Based on the assumption that the general function of consciousness is the production of meaning, it can be said that "historical thinking...makes sense of time."<sup>25</sup> The historical formation of meaning represents the activity of consciousness that places memories of the past in a meaningful historical context. In the process of temporalization, temporal contexts are transferred into contexts of meaning. Historical consciousness structures the thinking processes that make sense of time.

Jorn Rusen understands this activity of consciousness as historical narration. Historical narration is expressed in the activity that interprets experiences from the past in such a way that the future is developed as a perspective opening up on to possible courses of action.<sup>26</sup> In this sense, historical narration is the basic operation that constitutes historical consciousness. It is a form of thinking that first justifies the notion that historical consciousness is a specific area of general consciousness.<sup>27</sup>

Historical learning thus cannot be understood as an analogous absorption of historical knowledge. It is much more the case that specific abilities are developed, enabling one to extract meaning from history by examining historical issues and problems.<sup>28</sup> Historical learning develops a consciousness structure that injects the memory of the past with a context of meaning, helping to clearly view and deal with problems of the present.

#### Political Consciousness

While historical education has already expanded to such a degree that it can be regarded as a field of historical learning (achieved through the assistance of a consciousness category), political education is still on the way to becoming an independent scholarly discipline.<sup>29</sup> It is still the

case that all too often it is understood as a form of education dedicated exclusively to a process of political education. One sees this in remarks such as "political education is...not a science but rather a pedagogical or andragogical practice."<sup>30</sup> Although political education makes use of scientific knowledge, it itself has, as a form of "intermediate trade," no research focus of its own.

A developed concept of political consciousness can contribute to the development of political education, helping it fulfill the necessary criteria for it to become a science of political learning. The category "political consciousness" has the potential to combine various points of access within political education and thus to become a central concept of political education.<sup>31</sup>

Politics transforms the interests of the individual into a general sense of obligation. Political power represents an institutionalization of this process. Consequently, political consciousness can be understood as that area of general consciousness in which the individual constructs subjective ideas about this process. Political consciousness produces ideas about political power. Political thinking thus does not depict political power structures. Rather, it develops a conceptual knowledge of interpretation that makes the process of collective obligation subjectively explicable and open to criticism.<sup>32</sup>

Political consciousness can be regarded as the area of human consciousness where ideas about politics are constructed. It is in the political consciousness that the individual reduces the complexities of political reality to a meaningful context. Subjective patterns arise as political ideas and these patterns are structured by forms of political thinking and action.<sup>33</sup> By developing ideas about the legitimacy of the process of constructing general obligations, political consciousness grants individuals a point of reference for orientation and action.

This legitimization is an inner logic that characterizes political thinking as a particular form within general thinking. Political thinking produces an "*idea* of the existence of a legitimate order."<sup>34</sup> This legitimization is simultaneously a process of explanation and justification. In the political consciousness the individual develops ideas about the manifestation of general binding arrangements, as well as the legitimacy of political power. The belief in the "norms and power relations, which apply in reality or should apply, exerted by people over people" is the core of political consciousness.<sup>35</sup>

#### Historical-Political Consciousness

History and politics can each be understood as processes of con-

structuring meaning. The historical construction of meaning develops representations about the procession of time in order to provide future-relevant answers to present questions by reflecting on the past. The political construction of meaning develops ideas about the relations of power in order to explain the transformation process of individual interests within the realm of general obligation. Historical or political consciousness refers to mental substructures that are constructed through this process of thinking. As areas of general consciousness, they structure the subjective construction of historical and political reality. Historical consciousness renders the contingent experience of time meaningful. Political consciousness legitimates the demands of power.

The intersection of both disciplinary perspectives together with the historical-political consciousness constitutes the field of reflection of historical-political education. The latter focuses on the subjective ideas of historical-political reality as a beginning point and result of the learning process.

The historical-political consciousness is not static. Ideas of reality are constructed in the context of movements of thought, occur as processes over time, and are constantly changed or confirmed. The flexibility of this consciousness can be understood as a historical-political learning process through which the mental structures are permanently expanded and restructured. As long as the capacity of consciousness will permit it, new knowledge will be integrated into the existing schema. As soon as the historical-political experiences can no longer be assimilated, the forms of thought will be fundamentally revamped. This constructiveness makes the historical-political consciousness relevant to education theory. Because the transformation of mental structures can be understood as an effect of the learning process, the historical-political consciousness represents the central realm of reflection of historical-political education.

Based on historical and political consciousness, historical-political consciousness can be developed through two different routes. From the view of historical consciousness, historical consciousness constitutes *historical-political* consciousness as an overlapping field in which historical thinking is applied to a political realm. *Political-historical* consciousness arises as a sub-structure of historical consciousness. From the perspective of political consciousness, *historical-political* consciousness is formed by political thinking being applied to a historical realm. Thus, historical-political consciousness arises as a sub-structure of political consciousness. Historical-political consciousness is composed of the political-historical and historical-political thought structures.

## Political-Historical Learning

In historical consciousness, meaningful temporal contexts provide individuals with a perspective for guiding their lives. With political-historical consciousness, the historical consciousness defines those areas in which historical thinking deals with questions of historical legitimization. Political-historical thinking confers a temporal continuity on ideas about the transformation of individual interests into collective obligation.

Every political form of power must prove that it is capable of creating a collective sense of obligation in the face of an uncertain future. Using history as a basis for argumentation lends political thinking an apparent certainty. The exercise of political power in the shaping of future reality should also be legitimized by references to historical reality. The construction of political-historical meaning legitimizes power by demonstrating that it exists along a continuum. Thought directed to the past is temporalized in such a way that it serves as a guarantee for the sensible anticipation of the future.

Political historical learning occurs when conscious structures are formed that make temporal connections meaningful in such a way that political power is either legitimized or criticized. Politicalhistorical learning permits one to distinguish how the temporal connections between past, present, and future are modeled. Karl-Ernst Jeismann has proposed a thought operation here for this distinction.<sup>36</sup> He regards historical learning as occurring in phases that begin with the "perception, distinction, and classification of phenomenon" and extend from "attaching meaning to a phenomenon and judging it" to "assessments and attitudes...that result in specific forms of behavior as a consequence."<sup>37</sup> Jorn Rusen has extended this model, synthesizing it with narrative theory. Based on the idea that "narrative renders time meaningful," he has developed four forms of meaning construction based on traditional, illustrative, critical, and genetic forms of narration.<sup>38</sup>

In the following, historical learning will be categorized into its temporal typological forms. The shift in focus on time remains connected with the narrative-theoretical starting point, which renders historical thinking and temporal contexts meaningful. It is to be understood as a significant criterium in the construction of meaning, not as the narrative form but as the structure inhering in ideas about the procession of time through which the past, present and future are connected.<sup>39</sup> The basic forms of political-historical learning can thus be broken down into circular, linear, and selective types.

By studying the *circular* approach to political-historical learning, one acquires the capacity to legitimize political power by dwelling on its exis-

tence through transitions over time. The thinking capacity is acquired to make political ideas legitimate by depicting them as notions that have always been the case. In this approach, present, past, and future converge upon each other so that political power is depicted as atemporal. Thus the transformation of political systems is interpreted as a superficial occurrence, because the essence of traditional power survives. "Time is eternalized as meaning."<sup>40</sup>

By studying the circular approach in political-historical learning, one can acquire thought processes that conceive of political power as an atemporal phenomenon or as a type of power that has always been legitimate. The temporal connection between present, past, and future is deemed in such a way that power appears to be essentially ahistorical. This approach renders a political order legitimate through its connection to tradition. The thought structures in the political-historical consciousness are erected in such a way that power can be legitimated through circular historical constructions of meaning. The student of historical-political education develops the capacity to hand down political ideas.

Furthermore, studying the circular approach to political-historical learning can impart basic atemporal insights. This view does not dwell on concrete historical events and conditions. Reconstruction of the past is much more directed at founding and developing general principles. History is contemporized, because it represents events from which the meaning of fundamental values can be derived.<sup>41</sup>

The *linear* political-historical approach teaches one to legitimize political power through its development through transformation over time. Power is depicted in terms of its developmental logic. To achieve this, temporal connections are constructed in such a way that present and future power appears as the legitimate successor to past power. Linear political-historical aptitude enables one to interpret the passage of time as political progress. Political ideas are legitimized by being interpreted as progress in comparison with past forms of power.

The linear method imparts the thinking ability to use historical processes to legitimize political concepts or realities. The political-historical approach teaches one to see how political power can be situated in a causal historical context.

By learning the *selective* political-historical approach, one can legitimize political power through moments in the transformation of time. History is thus used as a reservoir of demarcated experiences, which can be viewed as analogies for contemporary political problems. The *selective* approach to learning develops the capacity for legitimizing power through comparisons with historical examples.



Selective political-historical learning develops the ability to compare political problems of the present with similar situations in the past. Historical examples analogous to the political present do not imply they are the same but rather comparable. Thus, selective political-historical thinking is based both on what is similar and what is different. The ability to interpret historical occurrences as alternatives to contemporary political ideas arises through the acquisition of political-historical learning.<sup>42</sup> The "history of historical losers" (Walter Benjamin) as well as ebbing historical processes and institutionalization can be used through selective constructions of meaning to legitimize contemporary political phenomenon. Selective political-historical learning imparts the ability to legitimize or delegitimize political power through temporal comparisons. One learns how contemporary political ideas can be supported or doubted through the use of historical analogies.

#### Historical-Political Learning

Ideas about the genesis of collective obligation are constructed in the political consciousness. The content can be subdivided into fields for which the particular forms of collective obligations are constructed. In addition to areas such as economic policy, health policy, and environmental policy, there is also the field of historical policy in which individual interests are transformed into binding laws.

In a differentiated and pluralist society, a homogenous identity can no longer be derived from history. Groups with different agendas and interests compete with one another to assert the general validity of their interpretation of history. What is relevant to historical-political consciousness are the "discussions concerning the interpretation of the past, the focus of which are the historical depictions and attempts to define a—so to speak—collective historical consciousness."<sup>43</sup>

In historical-political consciousness, the sub-area of political consciousness can be understood as that which constructs ideas concerning how collectively binding interpretations of history arise within social groups. In historical-political consciousness, political thinking concerns itself with history. Ideas are developed to explain how partial interpretations of history are transformed into generally binding interpretations of history. This historical-political process can be made to demonstrate both an authoritarian implementation of historical representation as well as a democratic product of pluralist historical interpretations.

Through historical-political learning, one learns how the process of the transformation of interestbound historical depictions into the collective historical consciousness can be legitimized. Historical-political

learning develops the ability to allow one to participate in political debate concerning binding historical interpretations. The basic form of meaning construction in historical-political learning is legitimacy. The uniqueness of historical-political legitimacy lies in the fact that it does history inside the field of politics. One learns how to render historical interpretations generally binding.

Historical-political learning makes the distinction between an autocratic and democratic form of learning. The *autocratic* historical-political approach teaches that one is incapable of producing historical interpretations that are generally binding. Patterns of legitimacy are learned that ascribe meaning to the notion that collectively binding historical depictions are developed by a minority and accepted by the majority. Autocratic learning develops the idea that interpretations of history reproduce historical truths. Collective historical identities thus take on the appearance of being natural.

The *democratic* historical-political approach teaches one that it is possible to bring interest-bound interpretations into the process of collective identity formation of social groups. It develops thought structures that enable one to legitimize the obligations of historical interpretations. One learns that one can bring subjective historical constructions of meaning into the political debate over the interpretation of the past.

Democratic historical-political learning develops the ability to examine and scrutinize interpretations of the past. Historical ideas that are presented as "historical truth" can be understood as interest-bound interpretations.<sup>44</sup> The democratic construction of meaning recognizes the fundamental controversy arising between historical interpretations as the expression of pluralist societal interests. Democratic historical-political learning immunizes one against the homogenous criteria of historical legitimization and identification.

#### Historical-Political Education

Historical-political learning transforms experiences with history and politics in the historical-political consciousness. It can be understood as a process

- in which students *participate* from a personal perspective, and in which they have specific experiences,
- in which students *learn* subjects, in which they work through their experiences,
- that *imparts* students with historical-political knowledge
- that enables students to *develop* historical-political thought structures.

What is important here is not only the imparting of historical-political knowledge, but also the ensuing restructuring of historical-political forms of meaning. The educational reflection in the dimension of development is no longer concerned with the subject itself, but rather with the structure in which historical-political problems are interpreted. Thus, it must be asked which political-historical and historical-political skills can be developed through the learning process.

With the political-historical and historical-political types of learning, categories can be reflected upon that are present through the change in historical-political consciousness structures. The learning types make available the historical-political consciousness analysis criteria through which the thinking activity can, in the learning process, be identified. The examination of historical-political learning can designate which historical ways of constructing meaning can be carried out or which combination of relations is defined. Under no circumstances should the analytical conceptualization of real life be confused with historical-political learning.

To be socially oriented and active, one must be a "mature citizen," possessing political-historical and historical-political capacities. There is no question that political problems can be more effectively dealt with through historical-based action than by focusing on the present and reacting with short-termed solutions. The historical-political education thus has the task of showing how the past can be related to contemporary political questions. This can be achieved either by generating general principles or illuminating genetic factors, or by demonstrating historical analogies.

Any historical-political education that attempts to derive fixed interpretations of the past should be regarded with suspicion, because of the potential to overwhelm students. A democratic historical-political education teaches one that the political interpretation of history does not impart definitive facts. Rather, it represents an open and provisionally defined process that can assume new directions any time when new knowledge is introduced. Students should thus be capable of independently reflecting on and actively participating in historical-political discussions and debates.

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