Book Reviews

Title: A History of the Classics of Political Socialization Research Theory in Western Civilization from Ancient Greece to the Twenty First Century[1]

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Political socialization may be thought of the way in which citizens acquire their political orientations. These orientations in a behavioral science sense could be thought of as 1) knowledge, 2) opinions, attitudes, beliefs and 3) behaviors. In Western thought, the process is thought of as the development of citizens. There is considerable variation in political socialization across nations and particularly when one compares different civilizations. What people know about politics dramatically varies according to education achievement, communication and background. A child born in rural Nigeria might have more knowledge of their village rather than the national government or other nations. Local elders may be the limit of their knowledge and the focus of their political thinking and rule. A child born in the United Kingdom who eventually attends Oxford University might develop knowledge of national Parliamentary politics as well as politics globally including institutions such as the World Trade Organization (WTO), the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), and the European Union (EU) which might be their focus of political attention.

The ultimate stage of knowledge or cognitive development, what we value, and how we behave is termed "political culture." There is a relationship between these orientations which feeds into the operation of a political system including elites who run the system and citizens who live within the particular political process.

In Western Civilization the origin of political developmental thought put into writing clearly was in ancient Greece around 439 BC. Thucydides wrote on the role of a citizen in a polity. The first to develop a written of thought about "political socialization" for a citizen was Plato around 430 BC. The words "political socialization" did not exist then and really did not come about until the Twentieth Century AD. The development of Western political thought was significantly impacted by the Roman Republic which commenced in 510 BC, especially the idea of a Senate or Upper House in today's parlance, but thinkers of that time did not address the topic of "citizen education" to politics. Plato, particularly in The Republic, wrote that the education of human beings should be very carefully laid out. In Book VII (Seven) he likened the knowledge of most men of political life to be paralleled to human beings living in a cave never having seen the outside world which is the

real world of politics. These men could not be expected to be guardians of the people. Philosopher kings should be specially trained from childhood on to be those who would govern to look out for that which is fair, just and good for the city (Plato in Bloom, 1968, pp. 193-220). Other human beings should be trained for roles in the city such as warriors, merchants, artisans and peasants.

Plato's primary student Aristotle (similar to Mencius being the most famous student of Confucius), wrote that the philosopher kings espoused by Plato could be corrupted by power and that any political system must be guided by laws in the form of a constitution. Any form of political governance whether oligarchy (the philosopher kings) or democracy could lead to the tyranny of the few over the many or the tyranny of the many over the few (i.e. minority). The citizen should be educated to be rational which included two parts, the practical and the speculative. The citizen should learn to adhere to a balance between extremes. Life is divided into different parts – work and leisure, war and peace. Aristotle was adamant that a society such as Sparta which dwelt on preparation only for war and conquest was an example of an unbalanced empire. He felt that man should not pursue a single excellence such as military excellence as was the goal of Spartan society. Aristotle discussed the development of the child in stages (age groupings) and preferred moderation in the development of all behaviors (Aristotle in Barker, 1962, pp. 116-123 and 311-331).

Government, including in Greece, moved to a different model for many centuries involving a monarchy/religion rule in varying combinations. The city-state notion of citizen changed to a nobility/clergy elite domination with the mass of people being subjects paying taxes and required to be conscripted into war. Societies tended to be frozen into classes and mobility was virtually impossible. Certainly there was writing on education. Two notable examples were Jean Jacques Rousseau and Jean Piaget. Rousseau, as opposed to Aristotle who felt that education necessarily lifted man out of a state of nature, saw education as taking youth out of a natural state of goodness and simply trained them to be a kind of good little subject in a stable, but selfish society. In his book The Social Contract he coined the famous phrase that man was born free but everywhere was in chains. At that time few received an education and the mass received little or no education at all. Most education was rote with scant creativity. In his book Emile he espoused an education which could allow freedom to youth to arrive at their own conclusions about science and society based on personal experience. Youth's inherent curiosity as opposed to being told what to think could lead to a better world (Rousseau in Foxley, pp. 160-178). Modern day Montesori schools purport to follow this principle. The influential American educator John Dewey supports freedom of inquiry – learn by doing – in education.

One of the most famous scholars to develop theory about the stages of development from early childhood to adolescence was Jean Piaget. He established that at about age 11 youth move from egocentric thinking (placing themselves at the center of thought – in this case at the center of identity) to abstract thought. A perceived problem was that the underlying egocentric evaluation persists in varying degrees throughout life. Thus, as young people begin to think beyond where they live in personal, local and national terms to conceptualize other peoples and countries, they have difficulty in evaluating others reciprocally (equally) (see Jean Piaget assisted by Anne-Marie Weil).

In the middle of the Twentieth Century a new class of scholars called political scientists began to be interested in human mental development toward political phenomena. The frontier of political analysis moved beyond the centrality of studying government per se (only) to the development of the citizen from early childhood to adulthood. This led to the birth of what became known as "political socialization." Fred Greenstein, one of the luminaries of political socialization research, felt that political socialization research was necessary to understand a country's political system. He stated that what is learned early is learned best and may last longer. The affective domain (attitudes and beliefs) is what counts the most in adult political behavior. Facts or the knowledge domain follow the affective domain and are in a sense sifted through what we feel about politics (Greenstein, 1965, pp. 153-171).

One the most influential works to emerge during the early days of political socialization research was 'The Civic Culture: Political Attitudes and Democracy in Five Nations' by Gabriel A. Almond and Sidney Verba. Almond and Verba defined three types of political culture with a kind of synthesis type which fit America. A (1) parochial culture would be one in which "political" would not exist. A religious state, i.e., a theocracy would not have overt political mechanisms and decisions would be based on perhaps the Koran or the Bible as interpreted by clergy. A (2) subject political culture would have designated political mechanisms separate from non-political processes. Monarchy or Emperorship would fit this hierarchical model where a one person or a few would rule and the mass would be subject to decisions without much or no input. A (3) participant political culture would be one in which a broad base of citizens would be involved in political decision making. The authors state that in reality all three types of culture exist in a democracy. People might participate, but also be a subject, as in paying taxes, and could also have religious orientations outside the realm of politics. They termed this development as being a "civic culture "or mixed political culture. But, importantly for our analysis Almond and Verba felt that a civic political culture could not exist unless it was buttressed by a democratic political socialization process. Unless an individual could be involved in family, school and work decision making, they could hardly be expected to be an active participant in political matters (Almond and Verba, 1963, pp. 3-42 and 323-374). America would especially fit this model as, for example, children are often consulted in family decision making. Europeans are often shocked at the involvement of American children in making family decisions. Instead of being seen and not heard, they are asked what they think. An authoritarian upbringing could result in embracing a subject political culture, whereas early childhood involvement could result in a more participant adult behavior (refer the research of Adorno, Frenkel-Brunswik, Levinson, and Sanford, 1950, pp. 337-389).

"The Theoretical Relevance of Political Socialization" a book chapter by David Easton and Jack Dennis documents a theoretical relationship between political socialization and the functioning of a political system. Politics could be considered to be the agreement on a set of enforceable values enshrined in law. These laws reflect the values of a society which are affectively inculcated early in life. The authors are very careful to develop theory that is not necessarily system maintenance in scope. They maintain that socialization may or may not support the existing political system. Political systems undergo both stability and change. In the 1960s America a counter culture developed which

presaged changes in the political system such as the opening of the decision making process to women, youth, and minorities. A viable theoretical model must be open to conservative, neutral, or non-conforming patterns depending on behavioral outcomes. A later criticism of political socialization research was that it was unduly oriented to system maintenance. This was not true of Easton-Dennis theory (Easton and Dennis, 1969, pp. 17-46).

Roberta Sigel confronts a reality often overlooked. It is the increasing circumstance that political learning is not over during adulthood. New roles are required of adults which may not have been addressed in previous learning, such as a new legal inclusion of previously ignored minorities in political decision making. Adults may have to be re-socialized to work within the context of such a change (Sigel, 1970, pp. 427-433). The demographics of aging are undergoing a dramatic world-wide change resulting in an increasingly large elderly population. It may be that many elderly will have to learn more about the political process in order to be treated fairly treated in old age. The elderly deserve to live a useful, healthy and happy life which may require adult education.

Political socialization research in America and Europe underwent a very robust pioneering phase in the 1960s and 70s, but underwent a downturn in the late 1970s and 1980s for two major reasons. First, there was the feeling that we had examined the process and that there was little more that needed to be accomplished through further research. But secondly, and perhaps more importantly, a new paradigm was set into motion – "rational theory." Rational theory put early learning on a back burner believing that adults behaved in a rationally calculating manner picking and choosing what was best regardless of socialization and culture. Consequently, one did not need to know about early learning and the cultural environment, but only needed to how people behaved as adults. In many ways, such as the mortgage debacle of the 2000s, the idea that rational people could not be seduced by, e.g., greed has given way to a renewed examination of the socialization/culture context. People do not necessarily behave rationally and the cultural environment may hold clues to human behavior. Maybe we are right back to Aristotle who felt that tyranny might possibly be right around the corner.

We have entered a globalization phase which involves the probable necessity to examine and understand socialization, cultures and politics world-wide. And society undergoes periods of both stability and change. Change often is part of the human condition and new ways of thinking and certain expanding agents of socialization, such as the increasing role of media, especially communication in the virtual world Internet social media, may shape orientations. Richard Merelman in "Revitalizing Political Socialization" correctly notes that a new lateral (horizontal) political socialization theory is necessary to understanding evolving societies. Previous vertical theory, i.e., the transmission of political thinking and behavior coming downward from parent to child is mediated by another agent of socialization - the media. (Merelman, 1986, pp. 279-319).

Note

1   Lecture to be Delivered, May, 2012 at the China University of Mining and Technology (CUMT), Xuzhou, China as the Guest of Graduate Dean, Professor Song Yingfa

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