

6. *Don't* write in the florid style we associate with travelogues or breathless magazine articles. A dissertation need not be written in a dry style, but it should be straightforward, economical and precise in its use of words. Overwriting means using multiple adjectives, sentences, and rhetorical flourishes when fewer would do. It is easy to overwrite when one is highly enthusiastic about a subject and composing an argument about it for the first time. Therefore, it is important to edit.

7. *Don't* repeat the same material at great length within and between chapters. If you are worried that you have to repeat material for the reader to understand the full significance of the new point you are making, be assured that most readers remember what they have already read, even several chapters before, and a brief reference back will usually suffice to refresh their memory.

8. *Don't* set up your theoretical claims in such a way that it is hard to imagine how the empirical evidence you set out to collect could ever disprove them. In other words,

make sure you have an answer to the question: given the kind of data you collected, if your main theoretical claims happened to be false, how would you have known?

9. *Don't* fall into the trap of believing that you have to develop a highly elaborate or complex theory for your work to be of significance. All dissertations need some theoretical angle. Some good dissertations develop highly complex theories. Most equally fine ones actually rest on a few fairly simple theoretical claims. If you don't believe me, look at a few books written out of dissertations.

In conclusion, I should say that my only hesitation about compiling these lists derives from the concern that they might make the task of successfully completing a dissertation seem even more daunting than it already is. No one would want that. There are various ways of perceiving the task that help to offset the strain. For instance, I recall one of my colleagues describing his own dissertation as, more or less, simply the longest form he had to fill out in

graduate school. There is something in that which should be of comfort to us all.

Without becoming even that modest, however, we can note that a dissertation is often best defined as the bad draft of a good book. There are valid reasons as to why this should be the case, and, precisely for these reasons, no dissertation writer need aim at perfection. The most important accomplishment of all is simply getting the dissertation done. For that reason, in the penultimate stages of my own dissertation, I pinned a note to the wall that read: 'Don't get it right, get it written.' Perhaps with the help of these hints from Heloise one can move some distance toward getting it right before one must finally turn to the even more pressing task of getting it done.

---

### About the Author

Peter A. Hall is a professor at Harvard University. Hall's research focuses on Comparative Politics of Western Europe and Political Economics.

## Comparative Politics: The Myth of the Eternal Return\*

Alfred Diamant, *Indiana University*

In every way, then, such prisoners would recognize as reality nothing but the shadows of these individual artifacts.

Plato, *The Republic*,  
"The Allegory of the Cave"

We are engaged here in an attempt to gain an understanding of the development of a particular branch of the discipline of political science. Erkki Berndtson (1987) has suggested fifteen different ways to do this, either using each of these singly or in combinations of two or more. What I propose to do here, could be termed an effort in the sociology of knowledge, according to Berndtson, plus a dash of an exercise in the "political science of science," that is to say, an examination of the external and in-

ternal forces that shape the development of comparative politics. This also involves viewing comparative politics as an organizational system; and even as a "market" where scientists try to add to their academic capital. Finally, it calls for thinking of comparative politics as a "dominance enterprise," a struggle over what is currently acceptable science policy in comparative politics.

What exactly is the institutionalization of comparative research? One is tempted to respond with the sort of categorization that Berndtson has applied to the study of the development of political science as a whole: it is ". . . to study something fuzzy and abstract." The task is further complicated by the fact that whatever institutionalization of comparative

politics we can observe in the world largely reflects the high degree of institutionalization of political science in general, and of comparative politics in particular, in the United States.

The developments in comparative politics examined here should be subsumed under the rubric of "differentiation." By using this term I want to suggest that comparative politics was differentiated out of the wider matrix of political science which, in turn, arose as a differentiation from history and law. It seems to me that at least since World War II comparative politics has met the criteria of an "institution," that is to say, there are structures which are governed by a set of rules; there are people interacting within these structures accord-

ing to specified rules. Perhaps it was only a particular set of personal circumstances that has made me view comparative politics as the sort of enterprise that was already fully institutionalized when I came on the scene in the post-World War II era. I might well resemble the Molière character who discovered with great pride that he had been speaking “prose” all his life. I was born under a monarchy which was replaced by a democratic republic well before I entered the first grade. The election posters on which I honed my newly-found reading skills overflowed with the symbols of class struggle, anti-communism, the anti-Christ, Pan-German nationalism. One might say that I “did” comparative politics even as I learned to read and even though no such subjects were taught either in schools or in universities. I experienced civil war, fascist dictatorship and the Nazi regime; and eventually found myself in another democracy whose institutions and rules were terribly confusing. How could I compare Republicans and Democrats with the Austrian Socialist and Christian Social parties? What was separation of power in contrast to parliamentary democracy? Why was there no significant socialist party in the United States?

If I wanted to be overly dramatic, I could say that forty years ago I was quite ready for comparative politics, and comparative politics was ready for me. To be sure, the enterprise of comparative politics looked mighty different from that of today, but I do not doubt that comparative politics has been well institutionalized, at least for these last four decades. Thus, I find it more useful to talk about differentiation rather than institutionalization of comparative politics. I do not wish to suggest that all kinds of change processes are simply forms of differentiation. In the case of the British Parliament of the eighteenth century we see foreshadowed in an evolutionary manner, the democratic parliament of the late twentieth century; this is not meant to suggest that Margaret Thatcher will stay in office as long as did Sir Robert Walpole! On the other hand, there is little that links the imperial diets of the early modern period with the parliaments created after 1918.

Yet, in the case of comparative politics during the last forty years I would argue for differentiation rather than full institutionalization *de novo*.

Over twenty-five years ago, the American Political Science Association recruited me to help conduct regional seminars for college teachers from small institutions so that they might be brought up-to-date in various sub-disciplines. It was assumed by the organizers of these seminars that I could do this sort of overview in an afternoon; and I had the necessary sang-froid to do it. Today many graduate schools offer so-called “field seminars” of semester length to introduce students to the field of comparative politics. From what I have seen of the syllabi of such courses (including my own), I suggest that students often get an excellent introduction to the instructors’ particular (or peculiar) orientation to comparative politics, but no genuine “overview.”

What have been the major thrusts of differentiation in comparative politics? Let me say immediately that I do not see any clear-cut linear patterns. I do not posit any sort of “take-off” from traditionalism into modernity, as was so fashionable in development/Third World studies some time ago. Thus I do not suggest that comparative politics moved in a straight line from Europe-centered, historic, institutional, non-theoretical approaches to a worldwide theory-building and theory-testing enterprise. I suggest two alternative metaphors—that’s all they really are—allusive labels! One might see the differentiation process as a Lindblomian “muddling through”; or, alternatively, one might even suggest a cyclical metaphor—the “eternal return.” I advance these terms simply as suggestions; I do not have great faith in their power to enlighten, much less “explain.”

What follows, then, are short-hand notations of some of the major trends in the differentiation of comparative politics, as I have observed them over the last forty years:

1. Geographic differentiation: from Europe outward to the rest of the world, with a recent return to Europe as deserving considerably

more careful attention than had been given before;

2. Shift from historic emphasis to contemporary foci, return to longer-term historic studies, including quantitative historic series;
3. Institutional focus yielded to the behavioral revolution (a 900-page study of a single French election), return to institutional concerns, though somewhat differently defined;
4. Study of governmental institutions, expansion to non-governmental areas (interest groups), return to governmental foci (“bringing the state back in”);
5. Concern for politics narrowly defined, movement towards political sociology and economics (Marxism *and* “rational choice”), return to political concerns, though more broadly defined;
6. Output studies (before WWII), shift to input studies (behavioralism) and radical shift to output (policy) studies;
7. Focus on political executive only, shift to bureaucratic studies (bureaucratic politics), partial return to political executives and leadership;
8. Political democracy/political rights expanded to social democracy and social rights;
9. Studies of power/order yield to concern for welfare, with recent return to “order” studies, with emphasis on the market.

Now, if institutionalization is meant to imply integration of these variegated aspects, trends, etc. into a coherent structure, then comparative politics is not in very good shape, indeed. Much of the work along these nine (plus other) paths seems non-cumulative and each new “wave” (Almond 1983) seems to reject what preceded it and does so largely in ignorance of the nature of their footholds. Gabriel Almond has demonstrated (1983) how interest group pluralism dominated the political science discipline (at least in the United States). Yet when the new waves of corporatism and of “bringing the state back in” took the field, they did so as if nothing of note or worth had preceded their work. In turn the wave of “rational choice” enthusiasm now sweeping the disci-

pline, proceeds largely in isolation from preceding work by focusing entirely on instruments of analysis from another discipline and in disregard of work done by political scientists. Given such discontinuities I find it difficult to designate as "institutionalization" the development of comparative politics over the last forty years.

The difficulties comparativists confront are much like those of the wider discipline. As David Ricci (1984) has suggested, we are engaged in two incompatible enterprises: the study of public life in a scientific fashion, and a devotion to a particular set of political norms. But we also have careers to pursue. Are we trying to serve too many masters?

---

## Note

\*Prepared for Mini Plenary Session VIII.2, "Roundtable on the Institutionalization of Comparative Research," International Political Science Association, 24th World Congress, Washington, D.C., 1988.

---

## References

Almond, Gabriel. 1983. "Corporatism, Pluralism, and Professional Memory."

# Between Leibniz and Voltaire: Exams and Grading in a Less Than Perfect World\*

Donald Chisholm, *University of California, Los Angeles*

Leibniz contended that out of all the possible worlds that God could have created, God elected to create the best one. In my best of all possible teaching worlds I would be working with a small group of students, all highly motivated, with the basic intellectual skills necessary for success; the reading list would be extensive but well chosen, the class would meet weekly, with the students avidly vying with one another to express their thoughts on the subjects at hand. In fact, they would be as interested in the material as I am. When each class finished, students would

- World Politics* XXXV: 245-260.
- Andrews, Williams G. 1987. "The Impact of the Context on Political Science in the United States: The Formative Years." Paper presented for Conference on the Comparative Study of the Development of Political Science, Cortona, Italy.
- Berndtson, Erkki. 1987. "The Development of Political Science: Methodological Problems of Comparative Research." Paper prepared for Conference on the Comparative Study of the Development of Political Science, Cortona, Italy.
- Diamant, Alfred. 1962-63. "The Field of Comparative Politics." Lecture delivered to regional seminars sponsored by the American Political Science Association, Syracuse, New York; Reno, Nevada; Bloomington, Indiana; and Knoxville, Tennessee.
- Gunnell, John. N.d. "The Historiography of American Political Science." Mimeo.
- Haeberle, Eckehard and Robert Picht. 1980. *Situation of Comparative Political and Social Research in Countries of the European Community*. Brussels: European Cooperation Fund.
- Ricci, David M. 1984. *The Tragedy of Political Science: Politics, Scholarship and Democracy*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

---

## About the Author

Alfred Diamant is a Professor at Indiana University. His areas of expertise are Comparative Western European Politics and Social Policy.

still be enthusiastically discussing the week's material. There would be no formal examination and no grades. To provide pedagogic structure for their efforts and to help them focus their thinking, the students would be asked to write papers weekly, the precise topics of which would be selected in consultation with me, and those papers would go through several drafts, until they were highly polished, shining pieces of work. In order that I might oversee the development of my students, they would take courses with me for at least a year. At the same time, my course

load would be light enough to permit the investment of time and effort necessary to teach such courses and I would be rewarded professionally (i.e., promotion and salary) in a way that would encourage me to make that investment.

Voltaire disagreed with Leibniz's assertion. And I cast my lot with Voltaire on this issue, at least as it applies to examining and grading students. Most of us will recognize that not even for high-quality liberal arts colleges, let alone the larger public universities, does the above description have even the most remote applicability. Classes are not small. When we teach large courses, as often we must, students' work is evaluated by graders or teaching assistants—distancing us from our students. It is the rare exception when students take more than one course with us. We usually are able to follow their development, if at all, only indirectly. Students are often not highly motivated. Although subject matter and the reputation of the instructor enter into the calculus at levels significantly above zero, the decision to take a course often hinges on when it is offered, the size of the reading list, how many times weekly the course meets, and whether it fulfills a requirement. It is the exceptional not the model student who reads through all of the course material. And most of us are unfortunately familiar with the "iron law of oligarchy" that governs student participation in the classroom. Worse, many students have only rudimentary skills, inadequate to the demands of college coursework. We rarely see students at office hours unless they have problems of some sort. And, whereas in my best of all possible worlds, course assignments serve only the positive purpose of focusing the learning experience for the students, in the real world in which I teach, that is but one function that must compete with several others. Grades *do* matter and must be assigned. I never tell students that grades are unimportant—it is dishonest to do so. Course assignments serve also as coercive mechanisms to encourage students to do more than dabble in the reading. Additionally, exams act as heuristic devices, telling the instructor if what one thought