Genealogy as an Approach to Political Theory

Abstract

The aim of this paper is to present an increasing need for genealogy as an approach within Political Theory, as a response to the growing impact discourse surrounding PhD funding.

I begin by establishing this paper’s point of departure, regarding the distinction between institutional expertise and “normative political expertise” (Lamb 2016, 9), and the concern over the latter, as argued by Robert Lamb.

I examine an opposing trend to Lamb’s concept, but find it not in another theorist’s writings, but the funding structures that Political Theory comes under. In essence, I make an interlocutor from PhD funding requirements, which require us to show impact, implicitly asking us to exercise that “normative political expertise”. I then explore what ‘impact theory’ would look like within Political Theory and Political Thought (with occasional glances at Political Philosophy). I subsequently offer a strong and weak reading of this impact theory.

Following on from this, I assert the need for Political Theory to increasingly engage in genealogical methods as a middle way, in response to this ‘impact discourse’ and its reliance on “normative political expertise”. In such a difficult position to be in, of accepting ‘impact’ and thus encouraging this political expertise, or rejecting the notion and receiving no funding (therefore becoming an exclusive pursuit enabled by personal wealth), I argue Political Theorizing needs genealogy more than ever, as a form of conceptual analysis which examines “conceptual analysis itself” (Waldron 1995, 166).

I conclude by claiming genealogy does not seek to undermine the knowledge or theories that expertise has produced, merely to unsettle the role we give it. I claim genealogy can do this, without contradiction, for it is not just a methodology, but a philosophy in itself.
In the beginning, we were philosopher kings (Plato 1991, 153). Or at least, could be. We were impressively significant as shapers of minds that one of our number was executed for his utterances, which being so influential, he did not even have to commit to paper. After that, the less impressive but still vital role of advisors. We may not have been Princes, but we presumed to educate one. Moving on, we became individuals on a “quest for universal knowledge” (Strauss, 1988, p. 11) ‘metaphysicists’ of morality, with a “categorical imperative” and rights and wrongs (Kant 1970, 143). Bereft of the one-to-one relationship we had formerly enjoyed with our dictator pupils, who were now a little mistrustful, we published articles so that ‘the people’ could read them. We had much to teach, and they, much to learn. Then, “dynamite” (Nietzsche, 2004, p. 90) struck: we devolved into guilty, resentful moralists, slaves and priests. The veil fell: our knowledge-power was revealed, and all of its “networks” (Foucault, 2004, p. 29). Our “true discourse” (Sheridan, 1980, p. 124) dismantled, we transformed into nothing but those who highlighted our own ridiculousness and endeavoured to present it as such. We self-destructed. We acknowledged, some painfully, some joyously, that our ivory tower, with its crumbling foundation stones, was no longer a place to give sermons from, but our prison, or retirement home. We had no one else to talk to, but each other. We even began to question if there was a ‘we’ after all. Now, just at our ending, being so apparently unnecessary for Politics and the running of things, we are asked to justify our existence or wither away. Apparently, if we want to survive, we have to re-establish ‘impact’.

This tale of the political philosopher or theorist, the emergence, glory days and eventual downfall, is of course here as a conceptual tool, not an actual teleological tragedy (or victory, depending on your perspective). From the outset, I plant my feet firmly in the genealogical approach to theory, adverse to such narratives. But, as a literary flourish, it serves its purpose:
to set up the question, ‘what happens when we are asked to exercise “normative political expertise” when some of us are already in the process of abandoning the idea?

Let us first deal with a few potential confusions, and clarify some basic premises this article accepts. To begin with, the concept of ‘us’. Here, I am making reference to political theorists, historians of political thought or ideas, and perhaps even political philosophers. The distinction between the three has always been a bit murky for me, particularly as during my MA I was studying Political Theory at the same time as the History of Political Thought, depending on who I was conversing with, whilst also undergoing a Continental Philosophy module as part of that program. I do not say this to insult: I see it most certainly as a positive, and an academic strength. Such subjects, I feel, share more than they do not, and when we try too hard to distinguish them from each other we set up boundaries that inhibit what we have in common: ideas. Although they may come from different disciplinary backgrounds (I myself was a historian as an undergraduate), most of us, I think, have moved through each subject area without second thought. What they do both share, is some form of a canon, whether we defend it or not: it enables recognition of our common conversations, even in critiquing it. But, although relevant to this paper, I am not here to discuss that per se.

Admittedly, the concept of a canon is one I wrestle with almost daily, particularly the limitations in its format: in a time where the written word is not restricted to a printing press, could we not be conversing over the ‘Collected Blog Posts of X’ as much as we do ‘Collected Writings’? Alas, I digress, and come back to focus. My interaction with the canon here is merely because I want to begin with the premise that whether it be Political Theory, Political Thought or Political Philosophy, the debates, conversations and theories had in these subject areas are built on, to a lesser or greater degree, a reading of individual (or a team of) authors presenting their ideas. I do this to give some form of unity between these three subjects, as I think my arguments are relevant to all of them, particularly in the inter-disciplinary academic
world we find ourselves in. Who exactly we qualify (even if we should) for the canon, whether or not we are interpreting those ideas ‘correctly’, and what we would consider the ‘right’ way to do it, is an argument for another time.

Next, the concept of expertise. Regarding this, I make direct use of Dr Robert Lamb’s distinction between what we could think of as institutional expertise and “normative political expertise”. In Defence of the Citizen-Philosopher: Political Theory and the Idea of Expertise Lamb highlights the advantages of abandoning the latter concept, where because of our education, training or position as political philosophers, we may be considered some form of authority on political matters towards and for the general public. Whilst we may recognise our expertise within the academic fields of theory or philosophy, inside the university and other scholarly institutions, when we engage in discussion or debate outside of our professional pursuits, we do so as citizens on an equal footing with those who have not studied political philosophy (or theory). We may make no claim to authority through our apparent ‘expertise’, because outside of our institutions, as citizens, we are no more expert than anyone else.

The rub then, helpfully one I can explain with a personal example. Political Thought, Theory and Philosophy are constructed and acknowledged, along the basis of ideas (taken from authors). Being the study of ideas (in some way or another), they are uniquely placed. Political Theory and Political Thought especially, as they sit somewhat uncomfortably in the Politics departments of our universities across the country, perhaps more awkwardly than ever before. As such, they come under funding categories which cause slight problems with the project to abandon “normative political expertise” that Lamb outlines, particularly as a Social Science connected to the ESRC. During my own various PhD applications, I came across the term “non-academic” partners. The concept, as I am certain you are aware, is one of “collaboration” to “make better use of social science” (Council 2016). These collaborators
can be “private sector companies, public sector bodies or voluntary organisations” (Council, www.esrc.ac.uk 2016). The message to “make better use of social science” is clear: our research has to have recognisable impact.

To have impact, one would assume, is to research something that will affect the world in some way, outside of its academic environment. In other words, beyond our immediate institution. As a subject within Politics, we would presume it to be something political. Thus, in this environment, the message is we must acknowledge our position as an authority on political matters outside of our universities and academic environment, with “non-academic” partners. We suddenly find ourselves, if we are not self-funded, being asked to exercise political expertise through our theory, “in light of recent UK government demands of the higher education sector” (Lamb 2016, 1).

If, like myself, you sympathise with Lamb’s argument, then we are in a somewhat uncomfortable position as Political Theorists and historians of Political Thought. Political Philosophers may well find themselves in a different funding category, but not always, and the AHRC also features “non-academic partners” (A. a. Council 2015). Thus, what can we do, if we do not want to bite the hand that feeds us?

**What They Want, or, Impact Theory**

Again, some qualifications. “They” makes reference to an emerging (admittedly inchoate) impact discourse that seems to be colliding with Political Theory, through such avenues as ESRC funding, and the philosophical commitments to “normative political expertise” that must come with that. On the ESRC website, this impact discourse makes itself heard: “We have awarded funding (through Impact Acceleration Accounts) to 24 universities to work in partnership with non-academic organisations to make better use of social science” (Council 2016). The intent here, I will briefly say, is not to analyse in full the funding structure. It is
merely to explore the consequences of this tension between those academics who remain concerned over the political philosopher or theorist expert, and funding bodies who seemingly, albeit implicitly, insist on it with the ‘non-academic’ partner. The aim of this section then is to hypothesise about the effects of this type of requirement (and the discourse that surrounds it) upon those who may ally themselves to a restricted self-conception of institutional expertise and the consequences upon our approaches to Political Theory and Political Thought. Specifically, what does theory in an impact discourse look like?

There is of course another assumption within this paper: one may say there is no tension, and simply not seek out non-academic collaborators, but I am writing with the idea in mind that this is not a solution, for to maintain conversations and discussions with those from a variety of financial backgrounds, we must navigate this funding issue. Similarly, we would not want to simply mislead and deceive our non-academic partners, in what we are doing. There must be some form of communication between the funded student and the organisation, as the expert (I concede, in training) and the ‘beneficiary’ of those political expertise. How do we intercept the authoritative position the theorist is placed in through this?

First, let us dismiss the obvious: we cannot make a conceptual shift to our partner organisation being included within our concept of the institution, in regards to our expertise, if we accept that our institutional knowledge is given an expertise status through being an academic or scholarly pursuit. “Non-academic” sees to that. What is it then that we end up as, if we are positioned into this ‘expertise-in-the-making’ type status? In effect, those who are being trained to “make better use of social science”?

As theorists or historians of ideas, we are not of the same ilk as those studying policy or conflict. In the main, we do not address immediate issues like the ‘radicalization’ of young British Muslims or the Israeli-Palestine conflict, to the exclusion or overshadowing of a
theoretical message. So how would our expertise be tracked? How could the impact of theory be measured? What would an argument for the case of impact theory look like if we were to make it? Are we inevitably cornered into exercising “normative political expertise” if we do attempt to present this argument? Let us explore these questions, by donning the hat of our funders. We will delve into the perspective of the impact discourse, as I have briefly (and at this stage in the paper’s development most likely incompletely) defined it. Or more accurately, as our funding bodies have.

First, a necessary foundational premise for an impact discourse viewpoint: that Political Theory, Thought and Philosophy, can and does have a long-term bearing on how we mould and shape our society, and so needs the theorist to ensure and diffuse this. Hence, he or she must be at the heart of this ‘diffusion’ as having authoritative knowledge, within a society which recognises normative political expertise. Exactly how this diffuses into the ‘general public’ – TED talks, educational programs and TV interviews for example - would require more study than this paper allows, for now all we need to recognise is in this impact discourse, and the impact theory subject it demands, the normative political expert is fundamental to it.

From this perspective, our laws, legislation and outlooks are therefore influenced by the culture of theory that Political musings produce. This is not necessarily to say we are fashioned from just one political philosophy reigning supreme inside our heads, but grapeshot through with various notions and ideas. As normative political experts then, despite (or because of) our own minds being a chaotic theory battleground, we would perceive political events as practical applications of theories. Thus, when we see something we do not like, theory can also be a weapon. It is not the sudden gunshot or cavalry charge of immediate, practical action or policy making, but the slow progress of the petardier undermining the foundations of a castle wall. As such, its pursuits can move beyond the reactionary, and once
its work is done, it can topple whole structures. It will however, because of its occupation, rear its head less often, and be less visible. We are not aware of the petardier’s work until the castle in its entirety has collapsed, but we will see the cavalry charge and its narrow, focussed effect, every time. The petardier continues through the ringing of swords and the glory of combat, hoping to find that one weak joint, which when assaulted with dynamite (an appropriate explosive to mention), will end not just the individual clashes, but the battle (the war of course, never ends). Likewise, theoretical examinations and philosophical pursuits can be called upon to be a shield, defending something that is unpopular, and rebranding it.

Enough of the literary flourishes: too little and we begin the project with a dry, uninspiring tone, too much and it becomes self-indulgent to the point of dull. These anecdotes are meant to sharpen understanding or insight, not cloud it, and we are in danger of sliding from the former into the latter now. Put simply, in this discourse, Political Theory is something that could indeed make “use” of social science. We cannot be expected to be as immediate in our effects as the professor of Politics and Public Policy, but political theorising maintains a role because it transcends the limitations of practical action, yet, and because of that claim to ‘transcendence’, influences it. The pursuits and occupation of the authors of our History of Ideas is important to understanding this.

As Jeremy Waldron says in the insightful *What Plato Would Allow*, they are not (and were not) legislators or governors. Their “division of labour” (Waldron 1995, 167) was and is to pursue in full the idea, the concept, without being overly concerned with the practical confines. However, despite Waldron’s arguments, in an impact discourse, this does not devalue the role of the *impact theorist*. Under this perspective, if political thinkers were not ‘free’ to do this, we could never aspire to examine or question anything for fear that it simply was not, pardon the repetition, ‘practical’. Thus with impact theory, the idea, becomes an ideal: not one that encourages us to talk and debate in lofty towers shut away in introverted
pursuits, but shout from its ramparts. In an impact discourse, this pursuit can be understood as theorizing with one eye on the world: seeing what exists, comparing it with an existing idea, and seeking a better version of it as a *thought experiment*, not actual legislation or policy.

This may give us a new insight we can turn back on ‘the real world’ of State decisions and bureaucracy, or on a smaller scale, ‘gift’ to our non-academic collaborators. Either way, at least some of what we do has the potential to involve a practical *interest*, but the practical implementation is another’s responsibility. Not having the latter role enables, empowers and gives authority to the former.

Of course, we may point to Machiavelli as someone who focussed more on the ‘practicality’ of his thought than the thoughts themselves, but this is to overlook the point (and fall into the grasping hands of the Skinnerians by claiming a kinship in the way he saw politics with us). Any refinement on theories or philosophies has come through *thought*. Theorists may observe the world around them, but still it is reflection which brings them to their analysis. Political Thought is the realm of the theoretical. Thus, when I say *ideal*, I do not necessarily mean our authors claim perfection in their various hypothetical republics or sovereign States (though of course many may well have), but that their pursuit is an idea that will in some way improve on another idea. It remains a notion, with both the author and her or his readers seeking its betterment, in the discussions had over it, not on actual implementation with observational, post-application, evaluation. As students of Political Thought, Theory or Philosophy, we are freed up to search for the ideal version of an idea, whether we think that *ideal* be in how faithful we are to the author’s intentions or original notion (imagined or otherwise), or in how we wish to take and mould the concept to find something ‘better’.

In essence, we are not designing legislation when we conceive the idea, hence, *ideal*. As soon as we do that, we are not practicing our subject. We have moved beyond our academic institution. However, our funding structure is implicitly saying that our theoretical musings
are still capable of influencing how an individual sees and implements a policy, rule, or political structure, and in that use, the relationship with collaborators we are encouraged to take up, we do step out of our institutional limits, whilst remaining in our subject. In a sense, theory is made to have a use.

Thus, because we discuss ideals without the need for us to actually achieve a law or produce a constitution, we can theorize a ‘better’ one, from a perspective of normative political expertise. It is this apparent lack or need to implement, which gives Political Theory its ‘impact’ in an impact discourse. In short, in this funding structure, as a theorist, it is not our job to make an idea achievable, but we must make it presentable. Of course, as Lamb points out, we do not necessarily have the luxury of time over someone who is not an academic:

“Wealthy individuals like Donald Trump – who have come to acquire sufficient financial resources to allow them to eschew labour – are bound to have an amount of time for civic reflection that dwarves that of most professional political philosophers” (Lamb 2016, 11).

Alone, time is not enough. In fact, it is the lack of free time that would be a better argument for the ‘impactists’ to make in response to this: it is precisely because we cannot eschew labour that we will likely theorise more (or with more urgency) than those who can, because it is our labour.

An example to clarify would prove useful at this juncture. In this impact theory, there has to be an alliance to a specific concept of liberal freedom, for example J.S Mill’s Harm Principle (Mill 1991, 83-92), before there is an implementation of anti-social behaviour legislation. If the ideal of the limits of negative freedom were not there, the rule or policy that we construct from it would of course not be present. Thus the practical implementation from any concept dreamt up by a political theorist or philosopher would be at best not be possible, or worse, we would be inundated with arbitrary policy without pre-analysis. Hence, the relationship that is struck up between us and our “non-academic partners” mirrors how advocates of impact
discourse funding would presumably see as that between renowned university professors and State officials: the idea helps make practical achievements possible, but in that, in the compromise the idea suffers through whatever form it is moulded into, it regulates the practical with calls to consistency. Stretched excessively so, the practical implementation can be accused of straying too far from a connected ‘principle’ (assuming it openly advocates one, and if it does not, the political experts will connect it to one) and be admonished by theorists. In contrast, theorists can also give their seal of approval. This is what is behind our ‘2-minute TV-experts’ sound-biting on the news about a recent policy or law.

Essentially, the agent of the idea, professors and PhD candidates of Political Theory, offer the building blocks (of a policy, rule or legislation) which both enable and regulate, in the form of an idea, to the practical agent. The practical agent, whether they be governors, legislators or collaborative friends, can then ensure the idea can in part be realised. This combination of idea exploration as our “division of labour” and the subsequent authoritative position from that, as normative political experts, gives our theorist their place and role within an ‘impact discourse’.

**Evaluation: A Weak Reading and a Middle Way, or, Is it really so bad?**

We have heard the case for our impact-driven, normative political expertise, Political Theory. Has it left us persuaded, still concerned, or even more alarmed? The extent of our reaction, really depends on whether we take a strong reading of it, or a weak one. With the former, it sounds like our esteemed professor of Political Theory becomes too authoritative, exercising a position dependent upon a “heirarchicalisation” of knowledges, with its inevitable subordination of others (Foucault, 2004, pp. 8, 180), making claims to power through claims to expertise. However, a weaker reading may not be so worrying. Under this lens, it is not the intention that historians of ideas educate the ‘uninitiated’ on the best voting system, the
fairest form of redistribution, or what justice really is. Under a weaker reading, this is not a prescriptive role. Rather, it is a problematizing one. What we can do, is point out when a State body, authority or collaborator is or is not doing, what they say they are doing. When a law is associated with a particular principle of justice, human rights or liberalism, but in fact emerges or allies better with a contrasting philosophy, the practitioner of Political Thought can reveal this, or expose what it could lead to as an ideology and not just a one-off, narrow implementation. Through connecting such actions with particular brands of various ‘isms’, or unpacking the longer-term consequences or philosophical commitments of a specific policy, the historian of Political Theory is a spotlight on sophistry and misdirection. This weaker reading gives an action that only ever comes in the form of a question, whilst exercising a role within politics, or alongside political collaborators. As soon as we stray into offering the answer, we must retreat back into our subject’s institutional arena, or relegate our authority to those who are simply engaging in thought experiments or conversation. How can we do this though?

First, let us further explore the concept of ‘conversation’. To lean on Oakeshott, unlike an “inquiry” (Oakeshott, 1967, p. 197) a conversation can be understood as being open to other voices, for there is “no ‘truth’ to be discovered, no proposition to be proved, no conclusion sought”. There is no “argumentative discourse” within a conversation, no sole intentions to “persuade” or “refute” (Oakeshott, 1967, p. 198). We accept we are not “getting to the non-distorted view” (Owen, 2002, p. 227) but putting forth a perspective that is reliant upon a “picture or perspective” (Owen, 2002, p. 216) of viewing the world. Likewise, as those who study other people’s ideas to help shape our own, we should be aware that “in terms of a given picture or perspective”, ours is not “the only possible picture or perspective” (Owen, 2002, p. 221) open for viewing. This leads our subject into being heavily invested in analysing concepts. As historians of Political Thought, we examine the terms upon which
rules are founded, or the general discourse from which they claim to be built. My own PhD project serves here as a good example. In 2015 Hackney Borough Council implemented “Rough Sleeping” as an anti-social act. This has led to various other councils, such as Chelmsford, to consider similar implementations (Council, 2015) (Council, 2014, p. 1) (Chronicle, 2015). These moves to preserve public space, are done under the Public Spaces Protection Order: this order came into existence through the 2003 Anti-social Behaviour Act, to empower local councils to impose it for various issues in public space. Such an order, enables council boroughs to introduce penalties to forms of behaviour they deem to have a “detrimental effect on the quality of life of those in the locality”, and are “persistent” (Crown, 2014, p. 33). How did something designed with the intention of protecting life, come to be used to deny sleep? How did someone living rough come to be consequently disqualified from the category of within the “locality”, and seen as a “persistent” problem? Such questions immediately require us to problematize the concepts of “locality” and “quality of life”, alongside notions of “anti-social” and “public space”. As historians of Political Thought or Theory, stepping into the world of rules, policy and legislation, we can offer this kind of conceptual analysis to gain some insight: what is a “locality”? Why is it that one has to be housed to qualify for it? Is living homeless within a place something that prevents us from being seen as part of the community? Upon what do we base “quality of life”? For this, drawing on discussions and ideas of the Polis, liberal and republican concepts of citizenship, “negative freedom” (Berlin, 1958, p. 11), and of course, the Good Life, allow us to problematize something that may be being presented as unproblematic. When confronted with this kind of troubling situation, we may as the idealists with normative political expertise decide to react with a “What is to be done” (Waldron 1995, 166) response to homelessness, but as Political Theorists, we are once again in danger of falling into the strong reading mentioned above, by far too heavily exercising this authority. Thus, we must not
neglect to on occasion turn to the other question within our subject – ‘what do we think we are doing?’

In essence, in this weaker reading, or ‘middle-ground’ concerning expertise, our task is to problematize the concepts, not be prescriptive: we “should not be so sure that we have had (from the thirties through the early sixties) all the conceptual analysis that we need, and that we now perfectly well understand the concepts of politics – like *power, the state, politics, civil society, community, morality, violence, justice, democracy. Order, freedom and law*”. Within this role however, we must also problematize our own activity: “We still require then, a healthy dose of conceptual understanding, including an understanding of the nature of conceptual understanding itself” (Waldron 1995, 166).

Our problem is conceptual analysis cannot exist within the realms of practical implementations. State legislators are too intertwined with realising policy, law changes or the ‘nitty gritty’ of running a State, to undergo this as their “division of labour” (Waldron 1995, 167) let alone examining the “nature of conceptual understanding itself”. As those whose occupation is with ideas, interlocutors and perspectives throughout history, the realisation of our own “captivity” (Owen 2002, 216) to pictures in the acknowledgement of the captivity of our chosen authors, historians of Political Thought are well-placed for such a task. Yet, this still puts us up as outside or different in how we philosophise to the citizen and makes us vulnerable to Lamb’s criticisms, unless we consider advising governments or non-academic partners part of our institution. But, as mentioned, if we take our institutional expertise to be academic, this cannot be so. What are we left with then? How can we straddle this uncomfortable position? What can we do when we know the work we engage in in our institution is going to be used beyond it? How can we pursue our projects as experts within our institution, knowing they will be put to our “non-academic” partners?
In effect, our paradigm of conversation leads us to our solution. A conversation cannot disqualify, for that is at odds to its intention. The difference between “conversation” and “inquiry” is any knowledge brought to the former “owes nothing to an external standard” (Oakeshott, 1967, p. 202), there is no “doorkeeper to examine credentials” (Oakeshott, 1967, p. 198) or to put it another way, prioritisation of a shared value or picture. In short, the need for an “arbitrating discourse” (Foucault, 2004, p. 39) is removed. Our funding criteria currently requires us to pose as the expert within a new impact theory, but we must problematize not only the concepts which impact theory wants us to, but the very nature of analysis and expertise, at the same time as we engage in our research. We can do this, as Lamb has done, with papers directly dedicated to the task, but we can also do it implicitly, and constantly, through a particular methodology: an approach to political thought that moves beyond simply being a method of “narration” (Bevir, 2008, p. 275) and becomes a philosophical stance, like that of ‘conversation’.

There is a particular methodology that does this: that allows us to offer a provocative version of events which does require scholarly dedication, but does not create its own credentials in doing so. A methodology that is utilised within our institution as a form of expertise, but simultaneously questions the very notion of expertise. An approach to theory and philosophy that enables an expansion of voices, not a reduction of them, thus robbing any theory that comes out of it its exclusive claim to normative, political, knowledge authority. Something that opens up conversation as a paradigm for Political Thought, as something which seeks to include, to expand on what is considered a ‘legitimate’ argument, by exposing the historical context of legitimacy. In short, if “conceptual analysis” that can analyse “the nature of conceptual understanding itself” (Waldron 1995, 166) is what we need, for the potential for scholarly pursuits to exist alongside an egalitarian mode of converse, then what else is more suitable for the job, but genealogy?
A View from the Inside: or, What we Want from us – Genealogy as the Middle Way?

Genealogy allows us to present another *version of events*, not the ‘correct view’. It does not seek to offer a new truth. Genealogy therefore, is not in the business of subordinating knowledges, or other voices, as normative political expertise is. Thus it allows us to, perhaps, utilise our political knowledge without elevating expertise above other forms of knowing: it merely adds it to the discussion. As a normative political expert, there is a sense that our claims are more likely to be true, or at least have undergone greater evaluation. As a *genealogist* within the impact discourse however, our knowledge is not based on “pure reason or experience” (Krupp, 2008, p. 323). If we use genealogy as our method of research, we are implicitly problematizing our role while we are practising it. Let us explore genealogy and what it does in detail, including a criticism of it, so we can position it as our methodology to at once both enable our subject within the impact discourse, and maintain our suspicion of the normative political expertise that this discourse endorses.

In *Clarifying the Foucault-Habermas debate*, Matthew King tells us that Foucault’s genealogical method is to “rationally criticize particular *rationalities*”. What can be taken from this is that to do a genealogy is to argue that its targets are not necessarily “*forms of reasoning*” but *ideas* that have become so fortified by the layers of historical and intellectual debate, that they have solidified as unquestionable “*canons of reasons*” (King, 2009, p. 306). It is genealogy’s task to tunnel away at this until we can see our ‘canon’ is as debateable as anything else. Indeed, King even quotes Foucault himself: “as if it were not possible to write a rational criticism of rationality” (Foucault, 1996). This can be seen to ally somewhat with David Owen’s claim that although genealogy does not produce normative criteria, it can and often does have “specific normative interests” (Owen, 2002, p. 225). Owen calls on Foucault’s use of genealogy as “being motivated by an interest in freedom or, more accurately, self-government” (Owen, 2002, p. 225).
Genealogy then, the discussion seems to say, behaves like a kind of ‘check on truth’, so we lose the concept of given truth, and gain contingent truth. In this way, this truth acquired from (subjective) “interactions with our environment” (Bevir, 1999, p. 126) rather than simply being universal truth, acts as a “regulative ideal”, a “criteria of comparison as successive approximations to the truth” (Bevir, 1999, p. 126): something which we accept may be tied to a particular perspective or paradigm of values, but retains strength as a claim by being the “best account of the world currently on offer” (Bevir, 2008, p. 269). From this, we can begin to view genealogy as that which moderates this “best account”, where truth must continuously justify itself to “the alternatives on offer”, or the genealogy (Bevir, 1999, p. 126): ensuring that we do not forget contingency and indeed begin to layer it with intellectual theorising to the extent that contingent truth gradually becomes given truth.

Once genealogy has revealed how theories emerge from certain pictures of the world though, is it not possible to simply acknowledge contingency in all we discuss, thus making genealogy irrelevant? Would not the accepting of contingency as we present our research beyond our institution be enough to ward against normative political expertise? In this view, genealogy becomes merely a stepping stone to this new paradigm of contingent truth and accepting truths as this “best account of the world currently on offer” (Bevir, 2008, p. 269). In essence, this occurs by indeed saying that truth claims are “authoritative because they are ‘shared’, not because they are given by pure reason or experience” (Krupp, 2008, p. 323), and accepting that those shared values can also be, on occasion, re-evaluated (within the impact discourse this presumably, as theorists and philosophers, would be our role). This is essentially the anti-foundationalist challenge to genealogy, and one to which Krupp forms a persuasive response to in Genealogy as Critique. If anti-foundationalists accept that their inquiries into contingent truth rest upon a paradigm of shared values that also can be questioned (for they are not given truths), genealogy is necessary as the method within anti-
fundationalism to examine the relationship between theories and the paradigms (or shared truths, accepted picture, etc) they rely on. In a sense, genealogy can expose if and when theories we develop, may actually be constituting the paradigm, rather than simply being reliant on it. Genealogy can examine “how we came to share those facts” that we base our theories upon: “why those facts strike us as the relevant ones, and why, occasionally, certain theories consistently fit the shared facts better than the competitors” (Krupp, 2008, p. 330). It is a compelling claim, but not one I wish to repeat here. My argument for genealogy’s still relevant contribution is to focus on the intention, or philosophy, behind its use: as something which seeks to undo the disqualifying process of “true discourse” (Sheridan, 1980, p. 124), which the concept of expertise makes claim to: being the ‘right’ approach, or seeking to ‘correct a mistake’.

Despite the accepted contingency, an anti-foundationalist truth claim is still a disqualifying form of inquiry: something which seeks to relegate (contingent) non-truths through its discovery of (contingent) truth. Essentially, regardless of the willingness to hold up one’s hands and say ‘yes, this theory is reliant upon a certain picture which can be challenged’, the philosophical intention of this method, is still to refine and dismiss, to find and narrow-down with “inquiry” (Oakeshott 1967, 197): precisely what is required of a prescriptive normative political expert. Genealogy in contrast, is to expand. In a sense, we have been “held captive” (Owen, 2002, p. 216) to a picture of genealogy as engaging in ‘theory destruction’ (the dynamite again) through its extreme historicising of truth claims, which often comes across as an all-out assault to the point of annihilation. However, as Mark Bevir explains, in performing this attack, genealogy offers “theory choice” (Bevir, 2008, p. 269), not theory destruction. It cannot therefore seek to remove, replace or destroy theories, merely unsettle our understanding of a singular one, and in doing so, allow more alternatives to form, from sources outside of a knowledge-authority. This means genealogy has a place as something
antagonistic to normative discussion and therefore associated expertise, yet without pursuing the eradication of the knowledge that such a position has produced.

The irony of course is not lost, that budding genealogists may have themselves fallen prey to believing in a ‘truth’ or singularity: the singularity of genealogy’s purpose, so focussed and hell-bent on destroying truth. Yet, the violence genealogy does to truths does not result in the loss of the knowledge that was legitimised by the discourse of truth (or for us, expertise) it was attached to, neither in a sense, does it relegate it. Simply, we can still believe what a normative political expert has theorised, but cease to endorse the concept of normative political expert. The disqualification or “hierarchicalization” of knowledges remains the occupation of that which genealogy itself attacks, the “true discourse” (Sheridan, 1980, p. 124), with its “verification procedures” (Foucault, 2004, pp. 10, 181). Genealogy does not create “subordinated knowledges” (Foucault, 2004, p. 180): it simply denies truth its pedestal. Thus, it can also do so for the idea of expertise. By highlighting how any ‘truth’ is formed from a “picture” or “perspective” (Owen, 2002, p. 216) of viewing the world, such as that of a normative political expert, genealogy allows theories which “true discourse” dismissed an opportunity at being seen once again as a potential equal knowledge claim, or in the least, an acknowledged adversary: perhaps not always within the same picture of the ‘truth’ under discussion, but within another framing. It can be something which can exist on an equal footing, but in a parallel universe of ‘truth’: another picture that exposes our own potential partiality. In other words, our knowledge authority exists only within our picture or perspective of it – the university. We can still offer opinion outside of it, but not a superior one, for the picture there is different. This does not mean genealogy simply offers us other ideologies, but questions the epistemology from which our dominant views come from, or the model of understanding, about the world that we hold. Genealogy is concerned with exposing the way of thinking that led to our view. It primarily aims not to merely unsettle what we
think, but to upset how we think, and how we have come to think that way: “getting clear about the partialities of our picture and the pictures of others” (Owen, 2002, p. 227).

What we can say then, is that although an anti-foundationalist stance will accept and endorse contingency, what emerges from this particular viewpoint is still reductive, searching to narrow-down, whilst genealogy seeks to expand. This is inclusive, for only by excluding do we set a process up as the authoritative or expert choice. Within anti-foundationalism, by making truth contingent, the philosophical pursuit behind the methodology does not change: we still search for an answer. Within genealogy, our methodological approach is to offer alternative stories: anti-foundationalist contingent truth, is still a singularity, whereas genealogy’s historicising of truth is to pluralise it. Thus, essentially, genealogy sidesteps the authority of the ‘impact theorist’, by having a normative political interest, but not claiming normative political expertise. As a methodology which enables us to posit an alternative story and not a new truth, we do not place our own version of events at the head of the table, merely add a chair: even, we make the table bigger so others can also sit and converse. A place where utterances are not “convicted in advance of irrelevance” (Oakeshott, 1967, p. 202). If we want to encourage the philosopher to “think as a citizen” whilst also communicating the knowledge their scholarly pursuit has given them, in essence, “not aim to correct” their “fellow citizens”, then genealogy is the method which implicitly does this. In this sense, we can arrive at Lamb’s philosopher citizen, whilst coming to terms with the philosopher. (Lamb 2016, 16,19).
**Conclusion**

This paper is still very much unfinished, but as it stands, I have attempted to offer genealogy as an approach to Political Theory, being a methodology that can acknowledge the concerns of theorists like Lamb, whilst enabling us to actually work within an impact discourse.

First, I highlighted the tension: the concern that some of us may hold over the existence and role of “normative political expertise”, within a subject which comes under a funding category that seems to ask that expertise of us. I argued that the introduction of “non-academic partners” into our funding requirements reveals the belief that our knowledge and expertise within our academic institutions, does and should have a direct effect outside of it. In being asked to exercise the expertise we acquire within the scholarly environment, beyond it, we are implicitly being positioned as normative political experts within a new *impact theory*.

I then sought to examine further what this *impact theory* would look like, and how it would influence Political Theory as a whole: particular, what we as theorists are expected to be and do. I showed how our apparent ability (or circumstance) which facilitates us in transcending the limitations of practical application in regards to politics, in fact gives us our place within *impact theory* as those who can and should influence politics. In effect, this freeing up of the theorist as pioneer of thought experiments, enables us to pursue theories and ideas to their full, presenting something which should behave as an example or ideal to the legislator, local authority or collaborative organisation. Consequently, a knowledge-authority emerges: the *impact theorist* is at once both the creator of content or provider of ideals, and political commentator who can criticise or endorse practical implementations of those theoretical or philosophical ideals.
Next, I gave an evaluation of the position described, briefly underlining the pitfalls of a strong reading of it. I explored in greater detail a weaker reading: if we could not alleviate concerns over the normative political expert within impact theory with a gentler interpretation, then a stronger reading would be dismissed outright. The aim here was to see if there was not some kind of ‘middle way’ between suspicions about expertise highlighted by Lamb, and what this new impact discourse within our funding seems to be asking of us. I tentatively approached what this may look like, drawing on the idea of Political Theory as a conversation as defined by Oakeshott: where we as theorists could communicate the knowledge our academic expertise has acquired for us, without the disqualifying aspect of expertise.

I then went on to explore exactly how we would come to such a paradigm, where our knowledge still required scholarly pursuit and application, yet was not so exclusive and founded in normative political expertise when communicated outside of our academic institutions. In this, I presented genealogy as a methodology that enabled this. I claimed genealogy could offer the conceptual analysis that impact theory needs within an impact discourse funding structure, but also the constant and implicit problematizing of the idea of expertise. I did not posit genealogy’s use solely in the contingency it gives us, for that would be to make it vulnerable to the anti-foundationalist stance, but also in the processes genealogy goes through and its intention: to enthusiastically expand on voices contributing to ideas, not just seek out an answer (albeit acknowledging contingency). In effect, allowing for contingency to our claims merely accepts other voices may be present, whilst to requalify “disqualified” knowledges buried by the “hierarchy of erudition” (Foucault, Society Must be Defended 2004, 8) actively seeks to give them their voice, thus creating a conversation. In this paradigm, the “external standard” (or perhaps in our case internal) that expertise requires is robbed of its pedestal, but not of the actual theories and ideas their institutional expertise allows them to pursue, because genealogy does not engage in theory destruction, but “theory choice”. It cannot
therefore simply become that which it seeks to prevent, and in turn disqualify the product that expertise creates. In short, genealogy as a philosophy and not just a method of “narration” can allow us to problematize the concept of expertise, whilst simultaneously listening to what it has produced.

What does this mean for the future of Political Theory then, and associated subjects I have mentioned? Am I suggesting that we all become genealogists in our projects? Not so, for I retreat to the aforementioned point of genealogy expanding options, not reducing them. I do not seek the replacement of one set of expertise for another, but a way in which we can navigate the realities of our subject and what is required of it, whilst still harbouring our philosophical concerns over that. Surely, although the contextual discussion over it is fairly new - in regards to it being energised by questions of funding - walking that line between the former and the latter has always been a pre-occupation of our subject(s).
References


Council, Arts and Humanities Research. 2015. www.ahrc.ac.uk. Accessed March Thursday, 2016. Universities, colleges, further education institutions, related departments, or spin-out companies may not participate as non-academic partners.


