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Politics as a Science: A Prolegomenon (Book Review)

La Política como Ciencia: Un Prolegómeno (Reseña)

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Book Review of "Politics as a Science: A Prolegomenon", by Schmitter and Blecher, 1st edition. New York: Routledge, 2021.

Resumen: Distintos enfoques metodológicos para estudiar los fenómenos políticos están en el centro de la discusión en Ciencia Política como disciplina. Schmitter y Blecher se refieren a este tema en "Política como ciencia: un prolegómeno". Los autores argumentan que es importante que los politólogos manipulen los métodos utilizados en su esfuerzo por identificar similitudes y diferencias entre los países en los estudios políticos comparados. Con este fin, Schmitter y Blecher presentan los principales conceptos de disciplina, enfoques teóricos y las fases de la investigación que deben ser seguidas por los politólogos en su análisis. Por fin, el libro es innovador porque proporciona una amplia perspectiva sobre el campo de la ciencia política, descentraliza el enfoque en las técnicas cuantitativas y puede contribuir a los estudios de la política, ofreciendo espacio para una pluralidad de métodos y temas más allá de los eurocéntricos. El libro es ideal para aquellos que quieren estudiar sobre la política comparada.

Palabras-clave: Enfoques metodológicos. Ciencia Política. Política comparada.

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Distinct methodological approaches to studying political phenomena are at the core of the growing discussion in Political Science as a discipline, despite this debate dating back decades (GOODIN, 2011). Schmitter and Blecher summarize this topic in "Politics as a Science: A Prolegomenon" in the first of seven chapters of the book. To infer is a huge challenge due to the complexity of politics. How can we measure power? There is no single answer to this question. There are many ways to achieve this goal. The authors argue that one method to solve questions such as this is to analyze the rules' functions and the practices of human social life.

The second chapter of the book refers to the concepts of the Discipline. For Schmitter and Blecher it is essential to understand these concepts. Additionally, it is important to manipulate the methods used as they help comparative studies of politics in their effort to identify similarities and differences between countries. Thus, comparative politics clarifies the characteristics of units (LICHBACH; ZUCKERMAN, 1997, p. 4). As such, the authors highlight the micro-foundations of politics from Machiavelli's contributions: *necessitá* – the need to understand why conflicts of interests inevitably occur in any society; *virtú* - which corresponds to the skill of deeply understanding such conflicts; and *fortune* – the occurrence of events can be unpredictable. These are key elements that guide analyses on how politics occur in democratic and autocratic regimes. Explaining human political behavior and identifying how and in what context people make their choices are some of the functions of Political Science.

Chapter three presents the consequences of politics, which are: order, material goods, recognition, respect, the effects of political systems, and legitimacy. The authors emphasize the meaning we could give to order: it does not mean stability but rather the ability to adapt to changes. Therefore, according to Schmitter and Blecher order can be understood as identities and rules shared among actors. The European Union, for example, manages a region to maintain order among its members through its institutions that deliberate on matters of the economy, politics and security. These outcomes become legitimate when people accept the rules of institutions and are aware of their choices' political effects.

The fourth chapter discusses the contribution of political theory to Political Science and the main methods of the discipline. The authors believe that liberalism is prominent in the field. From their point of view, this theory is rarely contested by political scientists. Beyond that, liberalism presents gaps due to its focus on individuals and its analysis of institutions within the nation-state. Although political scientists use different methods, realism has a prominent spot in Political Science as liberalism. Furthermore, Schmitter and Blecher claim that the discussion regarding quantitative and qualitative methods and their contributions is frequent in the field. Regardless of the method selected, the essential aspect is its rigor, the analysis of

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how dependent and independent variables interact with each other, and how it contributes to the current knowledge on this topic (BRADY; COLLIER; SEAWRIGHT, 2010, p.24).

Research design is essential to analyze a topic that aims to explain the political and social world. This idea is explored in chapter five of the book. Schmitter and Blecher present a cycle of four phases that researchers should follow when they have an idea: 1) logic of discovery: the theme is conceptualized and hypotheses are constructed; 2) logic of explication: cases are selected, a writing proposal is developed, before moving on to the next step, the variables are operationalized; 3) logic of accuracy: measurements and association tests are performed; and, finally, 4) logic of proof: the stage during which the researcher makes causal inferences and evaluates the results. It is important to emphasize that a researcher can sometimes face difficulties during this cycle and consequently, make mistakes, especially in the operationalization of variables. The authors suggest that researchers must also be careful not to fall into the argument of the best method or "most scientific", as quantitative methodology is overestimated in the field since it is attributed a more "scientific status" compared to qualitative methodologies. Depending on the focus of study, the latter is more applicable to research development.

Developing a good research design for understanding politics is important, but why are we interested in politics? This is the central question of chapter six "The Purpose". Schmitter and Blecher argue that the aim of politology is not only to change political practice, despite this being the origin of the discipline. In fact, for some researchers, it still can be. But for others, the purpose is to acquire knowledge and to contribute to future studies. Nowadays, comparative politics focuses on understanding the differences between units, although there has been an increasing interest in understanding similarities due to the growing interdependence among States.

In the final chapter, the authors review the main topics discussed above without intending to conclude, since politics is always changing. Politics as a Science is essentially a theoretical and conceptual book and proposes that the study of politics should be considered an art. The book is innovative because it provides a wide perspective on the field of Political Science. It decentralizes the focus on quantitative techniques and may contribute to the studies of politics in Brazil because it offers space for a plurality of methods and themes beyond eurocentric ones. Furthermore, the book emphasizes relevant concepts for the development of this discipline. Notwithstanding, it challenges some prominent scientific approaches such as liberalism and realism, claiming that the crucial issues are how we study politics and why we should be concerned with research design. With an easy-to-understand language and narrative, "Politics as a Science: A Prolegomenon" presents the essential subjects of political studies. It is ideal for those who want to dive into the universe of comparative politics.

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