

We Should Not Judge Those from the Past by the Standards of Today

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Abstract: We live in the present. Everyone looks at problems with a unique perspective brought by our time and our position. For example, if I'm a politician, even if I try to think from the perspective of civilians, I can't get rid of the thoughts of politicians. My thoughts will inevitably be affected by my status as a politician. Similarly, if I am a teacher, even if I used to be a student, I can no longer try to understand students from the perspective of students. There is no way to remove the unique angle of thinking brought by each person's identity. Whenever people think about problems, they will be connected with themselves. This is the way our human brain works and an unavoidable characteristic. Similarly, when we try to look at historical figures or events as modern people, it is impossible for us to avoid the differences in thinking and perspective brought by our modern identity. There are many things that are ridiculous to us modern people, but they are correct or understandable to people in the past. That's why I don't think we should use the current standard to look at things that happened before.

1. Introduction

For example, in some ancient dynasties of China, there were some women being blamed for knowing "too much" [1]. In fact they were just born smart that they can understand things well, and they didn't know that to be smart could be understood as something bad. Dwellers in their communities thought that they were guilty because of their intelligence, so they determined to kill these women [2]. It sounds really unacceptable nowadays since we already realized that people are all equal to obtain knowledge and be "smart", so that we will regard those people who killed the women in the story as murderers [3]. Although in fact they were murderers indeed (because the vocab murderer appears with such definition), their minds were not that evil as some other murderers nowadays. They were really feeling afraid of those women's intelligence, because in their episode women with a bit brightness was no difference with a simple person who knows everything about an atomic bomb in the standards today.

The purpose of human learning and studying what happened in the past is to obtain useful knowledge for today's life or development from what happened in the past [4]. In this question, the difference between "should" and "should not" lies in whether it can bring useful knowledge to our modern people, so my answer is "should not", because people should use people's standards at that time rather than the current standards when analyzing and judging what happened in the past. For this reason, I have the following premises:

P1) People analyze past things because they may learn from these things.

P2) People learn from things that could also happen to them or may also happen to them.

P3) People aren't able to learn well when they cannot totally understand things.

P4) To understand past things easily, people need to discover reasons and motivations of such things at that time.

P5) Conducting and comprehending the ideas and decisions of people in the past, we need standards of people living in the corresponding period.

C) People learn from past things well when they comprehend past things based on standards of that period.

According to those ideas, my argument is stated: People should not judge those from the past by the standards of today.

However, the premises don't seem that obvious to be understood. Although they all seem

reasonable, but there could still be counter arguments made against some of my premises. For example, according to my premise 3,

P3) People aren't able to learn well when they cannot totally understand things.

To directly say being able to or not being able to do something could make people feel that it's not a precise claim, since there are always extreme circumstances [5]. Some people may believe that people also could learn well because they may imitate the actions of ones who are announced to be correct, in such case they don't need to understand things well, but they still learn. In fact, it's true that people don't have to fully understand something to make the right choice, but in the process they don't learn what they should [6]. For a person, it is meaningless to learn something only by remembering and imitating other people's practice, because people learn things to cope with the changing world. In this world, a person will always face problems alone. At that time, no one can imitate, He can only rely on his own understanding of things in the world to make current judgments and decisions [7]. At this time, only when people really understand some things and understand the principle, can they see the similarity between things and come up with appropriate solutions when they encounter other things. What's more, when a person has a way to get the right result by imitating other people's actions, it must mean that someone before him has come up with an appropriate method when he can't imitate others, so what does he rely on? He can only get the answer through thinking and analysis, and what thinking and analysis need most is a clear understanding of things, so my premise is still correct.

Another counter argument possible is against my premise 4:

P4) To understand past things easily, people need to discover reasons and motivations of such things at that time.

For my idea, the possible counter argument is: "People who appear in modern times have been using the current standards since they were very young to understand everything in the world, so it will be very difficult for them to understand the previous standards [8]. These previous standards can't help them understand the reasons and motives of previous events, but only make them feel more confused and unreasonable about these events. " To interpret such claim in examples, they probably mean that a modern person will not be able to understand those ridiculous costumes in the past, for instance 150 years ago Chinese women were still asked to control the size of their feet. The fact is that although there do exist people nowadays who will feel really confused about those strange costumes in the past, it is still a process of understanding during the process they think about these things – no matter they can finally understand them or not. Even if they cannot understand these things totally at the moment, they will need to know more about it to get more ideas about how these things could happen (nothing comes from non-sense, isn't it?), and finally they will approach the appropriate comprehension for these things. Take one of my classmates as an example. When we talked about some ancient clans of Middle East that they asked those guilty people's kids to throw stones to them until they died no matter how big their guilt were, he showed great confusion of the reason those dwellers in clans did so. He thinks that no matter how serious a person's sin is, that person's love for his children is also very great, so it is too cruel to let the sinner's own children torture him to death. He didn't understand why those people in the tribe used such cruel means to treat some criminals with minor crimes, such as a thief who was too poor to survive. Although such people need to be punished, they should never be treated so cruelly. But later, we slowly learned about the life of the residents in the local tribes, and found that the religion they believed in was very special. The god they believed in told them that the people living in their tribes were the purest and noblest people in the world, and any sin made them no longer clean as a whole, and God would not help those residents who were no longer clean. So, we understand that even if it's just a thief, in the eyes of those people, his practice directly makes everyone lose the protection of God, they will face great disaster, and they will suffer endless bad luck, so they will directly kill the criminals to ensure their overall cleanliness. The reason why they ask the child of the offender to do it by himself is to tell God that the offspring of the family are innocent [9]. When the child kills the elder who committed the crime himself, God will recognize that the child is still a clean person and has nothing to do with the elder who was polluted by sin. Therefore, the child and

the child's family will continue to be blessed by God. Before we know the background knowledge, when we judge the behavior of the villagers according to the moral standards of the people we know, we think that they are cruel people by nature, and their ideas are as terrible as the demons in hell. But when we understand their religious belief, their direct execution of criminals becomes more reasonable, and their demands for the criminals' children to kill the criminals themselves become less cruel, and even show good intentions to the criminals' families. Therefore, the level of people's understanding of a thing will greatly affect a person's understanding of things and people in things, and these understandings are what we get when we study history. If we don't understand people's moral standards at that time, how can we know more about people's real thoughts and the purpose behind their actions? This will only lead to the result that we get in the process of learning history is not so beneficial, which is not in line with our original intention of learning history.

2. Class Analysis

In a class society, any individual is the bearer of certain class relations and class interests, and any individual's activities are restricted and regulated by the class and social class struggle situation. It is also one-sided to understand class analysis only as judging the class belonging of historical figures, and not to examine the gestation and regulation of social class struggle on historical figures. Class analysis is not a standard to judge the merits and demerits of historical figures, but a basic viewpoint and method. It should sum up all historical figures and their activities in class society without exception into the basic clue of historical development, and examine their times and the background of class struggle. Because there are different classes, groups and factions within the same class, we should pay attention to the connection and difference between general and individual when revealing the class attributes of historical figures and their activities. As far as the slave class and peasant class in history are concerned, there are also two sides of revolution and backwardness, not only positive, progressive and revolutionary. For the representative figures of the exploited class, just because they are exploited and oppressed, they should not praise and elevate themselves, and fall behind from low requirements, or cover up and protect their negativity in many ways. Under certain circumstances, when it falls behind and becomes dominant, its role in history may also be negative and reactionary.

Judging the class attributes, origins and families of historical figures is an aspect that should be investigated, but it is not the main one that decides everything, and the main basis should be the class interests represented by political practice. The same is true of judging the class nature of political groups, factions and forces, and it is necessary to examine who benefits from their words and deeds. In the formation and struggle of political groups and factions in history, family background, birth, region and marriage have certain influences. In ancient times when people didn't have a clear class concept and class consciousness, the influence might be greater, which should not be ignored, but the conflict of political and economic interests played a decisive role. This kind of conflict can make people of different origins stand together, and also make people of the same origin belong to different camps. Because a person's words and deeds are not completely and directly dependent on his economic status and family background. Family background is not the standard of praising or criticizing historical figures. Those who have the same life experience have different actions and functions.

3. The Evaluation of Historical Figures Should Be Based on Facts

History is not a pile of dead facts, nor an imaginary activity, it is the practice of human beings. Since history is the record of human activities in the past, to study history, it is necessary to study the group image that created history. In this way, it is bound to involve the study of individual images of some important figures in history. If we really want to rewrite the whole history, we can only explore the law of historical development through concrete and vivid historical facts. . There are two reasons why historians differ in the restoration of historical figures and historical facts. One is that the person left too little information, or contradicted himself, or had major omissions, or

made different inferences or judgments on the same records. Historians can't distort the facts subjectively, let alone falsify the facts, although objectively they may make different judgments on the same historical materials, which will lead to different concrete conclusions. The evaluation of historical figures can reflect different values. For example, people with different ideas, positions, beliefs, feelings or interests can have different judgments about the same thing of the same person, and different evaluation criteria will be found in different times. This is very normal. However, the factual basis for everyone's evaluation should be consistent. We should not conceal, fabricate, exaggerate, distort or tamper with historical facts because of different values. History is created by people in social groups, because creating history is the group behavior of people, and it is the collective force formed by the cohesion of scattered individual forces. As an individual historical figure, it is impossible to compare the individual strength with the group strength of the masses in the activities of creating history. However, this does not mean ignoring or denying the positive role of some outstanding representatives in history. The research results of history, like those of other disciplines, can serve different classes, strata, groups, nationalities, countries, political groups, interest groups or individuals, and of course can also serve different politics, economy and culture, and even serve military purposes or criminal acts. Because of this, when using specific historical research results, different groups or individuals, or at different times or on different occasions, can choose and pay more attention.

In ancient China, the autocratic system of emperors was not only the symbol of feudal system, but also the pillar supporting the edifice of feudal society. The feudal monarchy decided the character and destiny of emperors, and the emperors' personal strategic ability could not stop the change of dynasties until the collapse of the feudal society of feudal autocracy. This is not because of other reasons, but because this general trend contains its own laws, which are not transferred by people's will. For political purposes or practical needs, governments in various countries will keep confidential some archives and materials related to national interests at a certain stage, and even forge some contents or deliberately reveal some truths, but they will usually decrypt them after several years. As a historical research, we should keep a certain distance from the reality, and pay special attention to it only after the basic data are available. History is developing forward in the contest and struggle between light and darkness, progress and reaction. Historians have the responsibility to pin all the negative characters in history to the shame column of history. The importance of evaluating historical figures lies in opposing idealism and propagating historical materialism through scientific research on historical figures, so that the masses can learn and understand history through various channels. For the benefit of the country, nation or group, under certain conditions, the results of a certain historical research can be kept confidential. However, historical researchers should not be subject to various restrictions, but should have complete freedom. They cannot presuppose a certain result or a certain conclusion according to national interests or political needs, nor can they reduce historical research to just demonstrating the correctness of a certain theory or the legitimacy of a certain behavior. One-sided emphasis on the class and political nature of history confuses the boundary between historical research and the application of historical research results, and makes historical research sadly become a political tool or a means to achieve a certain purpose.

4. Conclusions

People's attitude towards history has been changing. Some people think that the meaning of history is to tell us what will happen in the future, because history is like one cycle after another, and these cycles are no exception in our human destiny. Some people think that the cycle in history is just because the predecessors have failed to learn the lessons of history, so their actions, just like no actions, continue to go to extinction and a new beginning along with the law of nature's development. However, we human beings do not want to perish, so we must see the truth behind the things done by the perishing groups in history and their ideas, They have made mistakes that lead them to a bad ending, and the valuable experience they have had has brought us meaningful experience. When we look at things in history, we use the present standard to look at history in

order to judge the right and wrong of what happened at that time. But if we want to get more benefits from the experience of our predecessors, we should still use the standards of previous people to analyze the previous things, so that we can see more details, Let history really teach us how to think and how to live.

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