

'Rather than investigating how power has been exercised, it is more instructive for historians to ask why power has been accepted.' Discuss

Both the exercise of power and the acceptance of power are part of historical debate. Galbraith (1983) follows Max Weber (1895) in defining power as *the possibility of imposing one's will upon the behaviour of other persons*¹. Power can be a critical factor in history and historical events, but historians question at what angle should power be viewed? A.J.P Taylor claimed in 1950 *that the history of modern Europe can be written in terms of three titans: Napoleon, Bismarck, and Lenin*², he presents the view that history is defined by individuals with power, that had dramatic consequences which shaped the history of Europe. But this viewpoint of history is questioned. The point of history was to study *'people who mattered'*³. R.J. Evans (1997), drawing upon the view of L.B Namier (1924) shows the view of history to focus upon not acceptance of power but the individuals who caused events through the power they held. To some, the acceptance of power should not be ignored as the ordinary person holds importance. This is especially relevant in the school of Marxist history. *It possesses no immense wealth, fights no battles. It is rather man, real living man who does everything, who possesses and fights*⁴. Marx as an economist and philosopher, expresses a different interpretation, the importance of the people within history. Marx questions the focus of history, this perhaps shows the necessary emphasis upon the acceptance of power.

The acceptance of power may show a more diverse approach to the issue of power in comparison to an individual. But Lachmann, R., & Pichardo present the possible limitations of 'people's history'. *While bringing welcome attention to neglected historical actors and episodes, much of this literature carries a congratulatory air without managing to identify the results of such movements or to specify the mechanisms by which actors effect change from below*⁵. The acceptance of power may show the effects of power on the disadvantaged and minorities in society. An illustration of the influence of the minority group on power is the suffragette movement, which sought to gain the right to vote for women in the UK in the early 20th Century. However, the exercise of power can be viewed as more insightful in identifying causation in history. The exercise of power is the viewpoint of history from the governments, monarchs, emperors and lawmakers. For a historian studying the history of law and administration there is perhaps more merit in researching the exercise of power as policy and statute is influenced by how legal power is exercised. Tromans, S (1999) commented on the exercise of power in the legal system through stating *it may be that the wider public interest justifies any hardship to them; but the question is what voice they should have as the policy is developed*⁶. This suggests that the acceptance of power and minorities should not be ignored but it is the action of power which is essential to shaping policy. This can be recognised from the Compact between Spain and Portugal, signed by the Catholic Sovereigns in Madrid, 1495. This is relevant to a historian as, to study different aspects of policy and law, can enrich the wider understanding of a specific country's history. Evidence of this can be traced in the ideologies that created Parliament, which began from Magna Carta Libertatum signed in 1215, which can be considered as the beginning of citizen liberty.

¹ Dugger, W.M (1984) The Anatomy of Power, Journal of Economic Issues, 18:4, 1244-1247, DOI: 10.1080/00213624.1984.11504331 commenting on J.K Galbraith (1983) (The Anatomy of Power pg 2)

² Taylor, A.J.P, (1950). From Napoleon to Stalin. Pg 74 (What is history? E.H.Carr pg 53)

³ Evans, R.J. (1997). In Defence of History. Pg 162 commenting on Sir Lewis Namier (1924)

⁴ Marx- Engels. (1958). Gesamtausgabe, I, III, PG 625 (cited in what is history E.H.Carr pg 49)

⁵ JOURNAL Lachmann, R., & Pichardo, N. (1994). Making History from Above and Below: Elite and Popular Perspectives on Politics. Social Science History, 18(4), 497-504. doi:10.1017/S0145553200017132

⁶ Kinsella, C. (1987). Judicial Review—Nature of Powers Exercised. The Cambridge Law Journal, 46(2), 200-203. doi:10.1017/S0008197300119774

The exercise of the power has an integral role in political history as this can allow historians to create links between numerous events. Furthermore exploring the methods and individuals of authority. The exercise of power, in relation to political history is relevant. The French philosopher- historian Michel Foucault (1965), saw truth and knowledge as the products not of cognition but of power. Foucault presents the view that power influences people's perceptions, therefore to study the exercise of power can be constructive in relation to linking attitudes and societal perceptions of a period. A period of history which highlights the importance of studying the exercise of power is revolution. In revolution, the existing acceptance of power collapses and the exercise of power has become ineffective and futile as a source of authority. *One thing is for certain, if these men gain the power to act, there will be not a political revolution but a social revolution, a war against all property, a complete anarchy*⁷. Here, Haxthausen (1847) captures the struggle between acceptance and exercise of power within the context of 18th century revolutionary France. For Historians investigating the various uses and methods of power, revolutionary periods enable the discovery of failures of the exercise of power and factors contributing to the change or removal of power. R.J. Evans presents the view *that History was a fiction of narrative order imposed on the irreducible chaos of events in the interests of the exercise of power*⁸. The exercise of power can be useful to historians in creating links, especially when viewing history as a process of events.

While, study of the exercise of power can be useful to historians, it perhaps highlights are the problem of the school of 'great men' history. This is viewed by some as a historical approach of the minority. The ruling elite imposing its political authority only exposes a small element of history; the exercise of power emphasises the greatness of individuals and perhaps forgets the masses. The analysis of power in terms of acceptance can perhaps be viewed as a broader historical viewpoint. J. Tosh (1984) suggests the limitations of studying the exercise of power, in relation to political history. *It illuminates the surface only. As soon as it is conceded that politics is not only about personalities but also about the clash of competing economic interests and rival ideologies, then the wider society outside the rarified atmosphere of court or parliament becomes critical important*⁹. J. Tosh presents the view that there are wider historical concerns than the exercise of power and to gain a more informed view of power, a historian must look beyond the limitations of the exercise of power. The acceptance of power could be argued to illuminate by focusing on the "history from below," *focusing on women, minorities and other marginalized people seizing their destiny*¹⁰. Historians could investigate diversity in history, therefore gain the ability to associate different parts of society and different events together and subsequently view the long or short term the acceptance of power.

Power is accepted for conflicting reasons. A debated topic regarding power is the acceptance of Tsarist authority in 19th century Russia. Even after the emancipation in 1861 of 51 million serfs, there was still acceptance, which historians debate why? There was great disparity and inequality which cultivated in the chauvinistic stratified Russian society yet the political authority remained accepted. The combination of Russia's autocracy with its highly stratified society enabled effective tsarist repression of opposition. Furthermore, any opposition that arose in the 19th century proved futile against the mass acceptance of autocracy. The acceptance of the Tsarist regime is an example of the strengths of studying why power is accepted. Russia was a society containing vastly different views. From the Russian Poles, fearlessly blinded by their want for independence to the peasants making up 90% of society, who were illiterate and loyal to the Tsarist regime. Therefore, to study the acceptance of

⁷ Haxthausen, (1847), Studien ueber..Russland, I, Pg 156-7 (Hobsbawm. E (1973), The age of Revolution)

⁸ Evans, R.J. (1997). In Defence of Histroy. Pg 196

⁹ Tosh. J (1984), The pursuit of history, Pg 76

¹⁰ Schuessler. J (2013), New York Times, In History Departments, It's Up With Capitalism

power in 19th century Russia will encompass more than the theme of power. The acceptance of authority was multicultural, not totalitarian and for a variety of reasons, a historian would study more than political authority and opposition. W. Mosse (1981) presents the view that there was a combination of factors contributing to the sustained acceptance of power in Russia. *Each of the three was a significant component of the old regime in Russia in its final decades, each fulfilled important social functions and each was, and was perceived to be, of importance for the autocracy. It was their balance and interaction which helped to sustain the ancien régime in the reigns of Alexander III and Nicholas II.*¹¹ The acceptance power therefore can be viewed by historians as a more complex task of research, requiring historians to take a broader scope of concepts into account.

Historians may approach the acceptance and exercise of power differently and may find contrasting results. But some question why there should be a separation not a combination of the two approaches? The study of both the exercise and acceptance of power can perhaps enable historians to view the long-term implications of power. This is relevant when considering economic history as the economic policy is determined by the exercise of power. This was represented in colonial economic relations between America and the West Indies in the 17th century. But the effectiveness of such policy is due to the extent power has been accepted. In reference to economic history the debate between Capitalist and Marxist theories regarding exercising and accepting power is prevalent throughout many periods of history and is still relevant to today's capitalistic society. The issues of class struggle can be interpreted as power conflicts. G. Eley (2014) in response to claims that the acceptance of power within the sphere of capitalism is not relevant, makes the observation about the relevance of 'history from below'. *Rather, those interests and commitments have long been abstracted into a set of conceptual rules and protocols, methodologies and theoretical approaches, topics and fields, cautions and incitements, that allow the largest of analytical questions to be brought down to the ground, including all those concerned with the history of capitalism*¹². This observation shows the relevance of the acceptance of power in history as it enables a multitude of factors and causations to be drawn into consideration. In the same article G. Eley (2014) claims that his personal preference is inspired by the phrase "No Need to Choose!"¹³. Here referring to the choice between acceptance and exercise of power.

An economic system that perhaps represents the combination of the two attitudes is the mercantile system, which largely contributed to Western European economic policies and thought between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries. This system demonstrates the combination of the two historical approaches as mercantilism enabled a country's government to create a favourable trade balance through imperialization and trade with other countries. This required effective exercise of power along with acceptance. This is presented by Adam Smith (1776) who argues the importance of incentives in the context of accepting power and ensuring economic productivity. *Public services are never better performed than when their reward comes in consequence of their being performed, and is proportioned to the diligence employed in performing them.*¹⁴ This links to connection between the acceptance and exercise of power as the incentives in mercantilism are relevant to the creation of a favourable trade balance for the country on the basis of power struggles and conflicts. Both historical approaches can similarly be seen through English relations with France in the period between the 17th century and 19th century as effective exercise and acceptance of power is noted by Davis, L., &

¹¹ Mosse, W. (1981). Bureaucracy and Nobility in Russia at the End of the Nineteenth Century. *The Historical Journal*, 24(3), 605-628. doi:10.1017/S0018246X00022536

¹² Eley, G (2014), No Need to Choose: History from Above, History from Below (Viewpoint magazine)

¹³ Lindenberger, T. Davis, B, Wildt, M (2008) "No Need to Choose: Cultural History and the History of Society," 61-73

¹⁴ Smith, A (1776), *Wealth of Nations* Book IV, Chapter III, Part II, p.495, para. c11.

Engerman, S. (2006). *During periods of warfare, as well as during the intervals of peace, restrictions on trade, including tariffs and blockades were deployed by these nations against each other, as well as in their involvement with other nations, belligerent or neutral. These constraints were designed to affect the European power balance and also to encourage domestic economic development.*¹⁵

In conclusion, historians investigating both the exercise and acceptance of power will bring different interpretations to the period of history they are studying. For a historian to study the exercise of power could be more constructive for a multitude of themes within history. Whereas the acceptance of power can fixate on precise aspects of history, this meticulous approach may not always be useful for historians. Furthermore, studying the exercise of power can in some instances explore issues within acceptance of power as part of debate and discussion. T. Wilkinson (2010), attributes the theme of exercising power as paramount to the understanding the history of developments of Ancient Egypt (3000BC). *From the dawn of history, the state's arrogance in its dealings with the population set the scene for the next three thousand years, For the ancient Egyptians, the price of national unity, effective government and a successful economy was authoritarian rule.*¹⁶ This is not to lessen the use of studying the acceptance of power, as historians are able to find details within history and focus on particular areas of history which enable a detailed, finessed study. In 1960s Britain there was a shifting attitude to accepting deference and the power of the establishment in British politics and society. A possible turning point of this social attitude was the ruthless media attack on the establishment following the Profumo affair. R.Davenport-Hines (2013) stated the lessening acceptance of deference, *the most bombardment was directed not at Macmillan individually but at the governing class of which he was a luminary.*¹⁷ This may be difficult when confronted with the exercise of power as this topic perhaps lends more towards breadth studies of change, patterns and developments over time. The practice of power, for historians, can have extensive findings that contribute to a specific period. Studying power can also be relevant to interpretations of global history as events can be viewed with affinity to different races, cultures and societies. Investigating the study of power is essential to history as without a grounded understanding of power, concepts and themes will not be viewed. It is within the sphere of power that historians can understand various factors within the common link of authority.

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¹⁵ Davis, L., & Engerman, S. (2006). Britain, France, and Napoleon's Continental System, 1793–1815. In *Naval Blockades in Peace and War: An Economic History since 1750* (pp. 25-52). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. doi:10.1017/CBO9780511511974.003

¹⁶ Wilkinson, T (2010). *The Rise and Fall of Ancient Egypt (The History of a civilisation from 3000BC to Cleopatra)*

¹⁷ Davenport-Hines. R (2013). *An English Affair, Sex, Class and Power in the age of Profumo.*

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