

THEORY OF POLITICS

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DYNAMICS AND DEVELOPMENT TRENDS OF CONTEMPORARY POLITICAL THEORY

ABSTRACT

In article, author pay attention to the potential and scope of the impact of new forms of communication on the form and content of theoretical research. In principle, such an effect can be seen in two related, but different dimensions of analysis. In the first place it concerns the scope of the political theory, which is enriched with new areas and issues revealing previously unknown or not perceived problems, phenomena and processes that guide the interests of contemporary researchers. On the other hand, global mass communication techniques significantly shape, and thus change the existing forms of theoretical discourse and the structure of the theory itself. These changes in the perspective of plurality and decentralization of theoretical discourse subjects, as well as the emergence of new research areas which aspire to the status of scientific discipline, gain innovative importance especially from the point of view of the attempts to achieve meta-synthetic accumulation of social knowledge.

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Political theory, as well as whole system of social knowledge, undergoes permanent evolution and transformation, modifying both forms of reflection, in which it is formulated, and its internal structure. It may seem that a particular dynamics of those transitions may be noticed on at the turn of the century. It is largely fostered by civilization development and technological progress, which created new possibilities of access to knowledge and standards of global-scale communication. According to many observers, the technological transitions in the area of communication are foundations of new civilization, which has a brand new vision of the world, attitude towards the time and space, and even new logics or new perception of reality. What is more, one may anticipate, that the new transition, likewise the previous great civilization transition, is going to overshadow and annihilate the previous culture and introduce the new standards, which are going to be totally alien and incomprehensible for people of the previous era.

Currently a new generation enters academic life. For this generation the virtual culture is something natural, while its model of accessing and using knowledge more and more differs from classical model of a bookworm sitting over library collection and busily filling index cards¹. Those new forms and standards of work, as well as social reality reception, determine contemporary forms and directions of development of political science and its theoretical achievements, it might become a main factor influencing future research (Bell, 2003).

However the results of the digital revolution reveal in probably every aspect of social life, the development of social knowledge and the political theory developed within its framework seem to be especially important from the point of view of conceptualization of new areas of political science research and formulating pioneering approaches of used in its exploration. The transitions ongoing within the social theory are subject of many observations and research analyses, which enable grasping particular trends and tendencies of modernization of previous stances. They are

¹ Resignation from traditional methods of cataloging collections in favor of computer databases is a sign of times in this context. More information about the impact on generation transitions on the evolution of political research (see Crotty, 1991).

based on the systematic review of theoretical achievements and critique of the activity of academic institutions, as well as analysis of newly published works from the point of view of new tendencies developed within research currents (Nocoñ, 2010).

So far on the long and winding road of political theory of evolution the changes induced by the logical positivism, behavioral revolution and post-positivist turn undoubtedly played the biggest role. However, these breakthroughs have taken place before the actual occurrence of the information revolution and related phenomena of global media civilization. Meanwhile, the history of science reveals that knowledge has always been strongly conditioned by cultural changes and still maintain a close relationship with the development of technology. For a political scientist, revolutionary modernization of the tools of communication seems to be particularly interesting for another important reason. After all, so far no one questioned definitely a formula of knowledge as the foundation of power. However, in times of mediatization of politics and the digitalization of information, knowledge of technology which enables easy access to knowledge can be not only a useful tool, but also an important source of political power (Stehr, 2005).

In this perspective, one should pay attention to the potential and scope of the impact of new forms of communication on the form and content of theoretical research. In principle, such an effect can be seen in two related, but different dimensions of analysis. In the first place it concerns the scope of the political theory, which is enriched with new areas and issues revealing previously unknown or not perceived problems, phenomena and processes that guide the interests of contemporary researchers. On the other hand, global mass communication techniques significantly shape, and thus change the existing forms of theoretical discourse and the structure of the theory itself. These changes in the perspective of plurality and decentralization of theoretical discourse subjects, as well as the emergence of new research areas which aspire to the status of scientific discipline, gain innovative importance, it is especially perceived from the point of view of the attempts to achieve meta-synthetic accumulation of social knowledge.

DYNAMICS AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE SCOPE OF THE POLITICAL THEORY

Computerization of communication processes is connected to two important phenomena. The accumulation of diverse information and the emergence of new, hitherto unknown issues and problems expand the range of knowledge and a wide, fast and easy access to knowledge resources. At the same time, globalization of mass communication is an essential prerequisite and a source of profound changes that take place in the area of politics. However, knowledge has always had social functions, it is only relatively recently that researchers have begun to analyze the structure of society and its development from the point of view of its production, distribution, and reproduction. The central question connected with the modern society is whether knowledge can provide rules for social hierarchy, to structure formation and relations of social structures, and in particular for the distribution of power of exerting social and political influence. Another important question is how knowledge can become on a global scale the basis for the formation of social cohesion and integration (Held, 2006).

Irrespective of the controversies connected with the notion of the global civil society, it becomes an important object of interest of modern researchers. The concept of globalization is recognized here as not only multidimensional and extremely complex, but also dynamic, accessible and, what is also important, dynamic and accessible in the experience of the new forms of citizenship. In this context, the research try to provide answers to the question, how the transmission of message, communication and industrial culture is based within historical specifics of particular forms of political culture, processes of formation and transformation of states and divers trajectories of organizing and disorganizing the civil societies (Chakravartty, Zhao, 2007).

According to contemporary researchers, the internet community creates the foundations of transnational public opinion and forms of global civil society. The emergence of signs of transnational civil society and global public sphere marks a new research reality, directing the attention of political scientists to the cosmopolitan dimension of democracy and

its structures. However, it is still not an institutionalized form, it has its own communication channels in which the public debate occurs and its identity is formed. In this perspective a new, previously undisclosed level of democracy appears (Bohman, 2004, p. 164–165).

The emergence of transnational dimension of politics coincides with the tendency to expand the sphere of politics on every possible areas of social life. The transition from narrowly identified politics with organization of state with wide politicization of social life becomes deeper and deeper. Under the influence of the media-influenced globalized world, the assumption that political relations are a common phenomenon that determines or at least conditions many areas, and potentially even the whole of social life, are not only a common opinion, but also appears in the scientific reflection. These tendencies may be illustrated by vision of social research created by Anthony Giddens that questions the possibility of researching the contemporary society without taking the concept of state and its institutional infrastructure. According to this stance, irrespective of conceptualization of the notion of “society”, it is always territorially and politically determined formation and not a domain limited by a scope of a particular scientific discipline: sociology, economy or political science. In this context, conceptualization of society occurs via the concept of nation state, while social order is tightly connected with particular political order (Giddens, 1987, p. 25–33). This noticeable acquisition of problems that traditionally belongs to sociology by political scientists and representatives of other subdisciplines is sometimes seen as a symptom of reduction of the scope of domain of specifically social studies for the domain of politics and expanding function of the state (Luhmann, 1994, p. 18).

From this point of view, an important feature of the present approach in political theory is also opening up to new challenges and emerging issues in the context of contemporary empirical research, which is also carried out in the other social sciences. Reactions of the world public opinion to the relations from political events published in the World Wide Web and attempts to organize social movement via electronic links, drew attention to the fact that the international Internet community is potentially a strong center of political resistance (Andrews, 1999, p. 81). The Internet links become a power resource and the instrument of its acquisition. It

is confirmed by exponential growth of blogs created by both actors of political life and people who aspire for this name, for whom this form of communication sometimes is the only possibility to occur in social consciousness.

The issue of mediatization of politics is increasingly approaching the center of interest of political theory. Even today in social practice the political significance of events is restricted to the facts of media. Media evaluate the data as important and significant in terms of the political system. In this context, a social event that does not exist in the media is not a political event. Today the media largely took over the functions of mobilization and legitimacy of political action. Along with media publicity, a political phenomenon appears in public discourse and obtains an increasingly important role and status in the structure of social problems (Ellis, 2006, p. 207). At the same time observers began to take the political empowerment of the mass media into account. One of important features of modern democracies, apart from media pluralism, is also their involvement in shaping and political profiling of the public discourse. Postulated objectivity, especially in the case of privately controlled media institutions, is treated as an unattainable idea rather than a goal possible to the actual implementation. It is difficult to conclude that the media, from the owners, through editorial colleges, to the journalists themselves, do not have their own opinion which would influence their attitudes and evaluation being the integral part of the media communication. In this perspective, the mass media have significantly overcome their reporting and functions – they also construct the reality and ways of reception.

In this context a transition of the character of political reality can be noticed. It becomes more virtual, artificially created by media, where the image of political actor and the created problems may differ from those existing in reality. The media practices directed into marketing mechanisms of imposing the particular meanings and ways of perceptions to attain objectivization of political phenomena become one of the main research problems. From the point of view of thus degenerated politics, the postmodern order, based on the specific technology of power, evolves towards the postpolitical order (Golinowski, 2007).

Within this new, expanded research scope appear problems and areas which significantly exceed the frames of traditional disciplinary division (Wallerstein, 2001, p. 237–245). The current scope of the reflection of theory of politics significantly exceeds former frames of inquiry connected with methodology and the conditions of scientific analysis of politics. The theory of politics, which is interdisciplinary of its very nature, is sometimes identified with social theory. The political theory has been included into the sphere of ontological and epistemological reflections, which abolishes the boundary lines between the political philosophy and political theory, which were quite clear before.

In the traditional approach, the classical, normatively oriented political theory was treated equally with politics and clearly separated from axiologically neutral, empirically oriented theory. Contemporary representatives of political theory do not limit themselves to traditionally understood research object. They research events and facts, which are also subject of other, more general scientific disciplines, and the theory itself covers the problems connected with nature, essence and forms of political reality. Thus the contemporary political theory emphasizes the meaning of interdisciplinary approaches that adhere to the achievements of disciplines like philosophy, sociology, and psychology in larger extent.

In the intensive increase of knowledge and scientific specializations one may notice two antithetical tendencies: dispersion and integration of theoretical research (Wallerstein 1990). Fragmentation and differentiation of theoretical research create a source of integration, convergence and synthetic tendencies in the same time. As a result, political theory is an object of permanent reorganization due to ongoing pressure from two opposite trends: division and unification. Both trends have their advantages and disadvantages. The principal advantage of the fragmentation of political theory research area is focusing on narrow issues, which contributes to a deeper analysis of the issues and a more precise insight. The disadvantage of this approach is the difficulty in correlation and correspondence with the results of research carried out in another problem areas. These difficulties stimulate the attempts to integrate the theoretical achievements by creating the synthesizing structures at a higher level of generalization, or carrying

out interdisciplinary, multidisciplinary and cross-disciplinary research (Kozłowski, 1996, p. 9–20).

THE EVOLUTION OF THE STRUCTURE AND FORMS OF CONTEMPORARY POLITICAL THEORY

As a consequence, the contemporary political theory struggles against the permanently recurring problems of structure and identity. The political science still does not have unified theoretical substructure, holistic and integral political theory. The structure of political theory is composed of many schools, trends or research traditions inspired by new postmodern philosophical ideas. The contemporary political theory, determined by new philosophical ideas, shows strong inclinations towards the rejections of specifically scientific model of research. Those tendencies in large extent are based on the postmodern argumentation justifying lack of possibility to scientifically explain the complex reality according to homogenous methodological approach or single model of scientific explanation. The consequences of this notion about the traditional political science based on behavioral and positivist assumptions mark the fundamental differences in the views on the contemporary nature of political reality, level of theoretical generalizations, potential of causal explanation and axiological engagement of theory (Nocoń 2009, p. 11–26).

Within the new theoretical approaches, the nature of the political reality is polymorphic and multidimensional. Generalizations formulated within each theory are determined by time and context, and explanations go beyond cause-effect relationship. At the same time it is assumed that in the process of scientific study of politics researcher and knowledge interact with each other. As a result, political theory is also seen through the prism of normative commitment, and conclusions that are formulated by researchers are also based on a specific axiological foundation represented by them (Coats, 2003, p. 112–128). It is connected not only with the situation when researchers are engaged in particular ideology or the worldview influences research results. It is about both meaning of political events for recognition of research aims and using the scientific

achievements for political interpretation of processes and legitimization of social phenomena and processes. As Peter Lassman notes, in politically constituted world, separating oneself from politics would be an incredible phenomenon, because “politics always enters through the backdoor” (1989, p. 5–6). This unintended but inevitable role of political theory in the age of globalization refers not only to legitimization of particular governments or political systems. Currently it may also act for legitimization of contemporary social order in global dimension.

The growing dynamics of accumulation of knowledge determines also the emergence of multitude of paradigms, schools and theoretical approaches. However, it is not tantamount to incorporation of successively formulated ideas by the achievements of political science. Although, this process fosters further diversification of social science and dispersion of more or less coherent paradigms. The unity, coherence and collectivity of political science clearly disappear. What is more, the multidimensional evolution of specific attitudes in many cases blurs the differences between them, making the identification more difficult (Almond, 1990).

However researchers, recognize the limitations and shortcomings of the theory, which are determined by its high diversification and low correlation. Hence appears the temptation to formulate the interpretive perspective, which would be a synchronous “unity in diversity”, where the colorfulness, polymorphism and complexity of political phenomena and the corresponding multi-context and multi-level theoretical knowledge could be included into an integrating metasynthesis. This idea of a comprehensive political theory, creating a sort of unified theory of political science, which would unite empirical and normative claims, albeit in rudimentary form, is still present in contemporary discursive polemic of political science.

EVALUATION DILEMMAS OF DEVELOPMENT TRENDS OF POLITICAL THEORY

The technological momentum of the new millennium with its inspirations and change of the perception of both social phenomena and science itself induce the reflection over direction and nature of the current trends

within the political theory. Characteristics of the history and development of political science as an academic discipline and evaluation of its achievements, the direction of evolution, as well as new forms of practice, is performed periodically by both political scientists themselves, as well as by representatives of other disciplines. In this sense, these changes can be perceived from the internal perspective and from the outside of the political science.

The development trends that appear within it are hardly ever recognized as progress. The problem of evaluation of contemporary transitions within the political theory is still open, and the question of progressive character of transitions in the political research seems very controversial from the point of view of over a century of the existence of the discipline². One can talk about the qualitative development, but also about random changes that cannot be called progressive in any sense. The influence of global communication on scope and forms of the development of political theories may be perceived from the point of view of many aspects and criteria shaping different valuations and attitudes towards this phenomenon: from positive, fully accepting the evolution processes, through justified skepticism, towards full rejection of the new forms.

The optimistic valuation of the transition is usually based on argumentation emphasizing that growth of the dynamics of political theory connected with elimination of barriers that limit the wide access to the knowledge resources, fosters inter-operability and strengthens partnership and research innovativeness. The plurality and decentralization of scientific discourse would stimulate the cooperation between centers. The cooperative realization of research projects based on partnership is replacing the dominance of elite centers.

Universality and equality of unlimited access to knowledge is a value representing the attribute of the modern civil society, which initiates, among other things, the transition of structure of theoretical discourse. Mass communication technology eliminates the division into active creators and passive recipients. Thus, instead of the previously dominant, authoritative tradition and elite appointing the privileged research

² About the controversies concerning the idea of scientific progress: Jonkisz, 1998.

approaches there will be a shift towards pluralism and democratization based on participatory research culture. Theoretical authorities will be selected through criteria based on the explanatory utility of research projects signed by individual researchers or groups. Mass communication is used for greater interaction with the wider research community and increased criticism is used for innovation and improvement.

According to the more critical stance, despite technical possibilities of accumulation and spread of knowledge, the political theory is still not able to provide us with cognitive certainty and the model of political development. It causes the concerns about the inclinations for concentration and limitation of access to valuable and useful knowledge in contrast to the flood of worthless information as well as its potential control and the vision of global power of knowledge. The growth of social role of professional knowledge may also potentially determine the efforts towards its exclusivity and marginalization of groups that are not fully able to fully utilize the technological progress (Steher 2005, p. 48).

Such diagnoses may seem clear and up-to-date especially in the pluralized reality of global communication, where both criteria of formulating scientific arguments and the methodological mode of their justification and argumentation vanishes in the internet turmoil of eloquent elaborates full of erudition enriched by sophisticated eristic and based of a solid foundation of social engineering.

Unformed structure of political theory leads to the development of one-sided research, focusing on certain assumptions and methodological procedures, which as a consequence of their use, are scarcely or not at all correlated with research within particular paradigms. Paradigms and research orientations formulated on their basis offer certain interpretative perspective, the most exposing only certain aspects of social life, often overlooked or only partially included in other approaches.

The fragmentation of knowledge marking plurality and dispersion of theoretical reflection, as well as is normative engagement, sometimes leads to proclamations of the crisis of theory, its decline or even downfall (DeLeon, Vogenbeck, 2007, p. 6–7). Significant concerns are also related to the collapse of the importance of niche or national trends in political theory, the commercialization of scientific reflection, uncontrolled and

frequent violations of copyright, or entropy of bright and clear criteria for the evaluation of scientific achievements of researchers. In this context, the object expansion of theoretical discourse favors blurring of the criteria for assessing the explanatory potential and relaxation of organized forms of scientific skepticism. Under these conditions, it is difficult to determine the criteria of progress, and there is a much greater likelihood of accidental development of knowledge (Adcock, Bevir, Stimson, 2007, p. 1–2).

However, regardless of individual and collective attitude, the process of modernization of political theory stimulated by the development of the means of global communication seems to be inevitable. Most researchers are consistent that there is no escape from the theory, and in particular from the political theory. Politics, as a sphere which organizes the social life both in the individual and collective dimension, is permanently involved in the academic debate on the main concepts, phenomena, processes and rules for its implementation. This happens regardless of technocratic or pragmatic strategy of governments. This applies not only to descriptive or analytical forms of theoretical reflection, but, what is important, to its normative considerations (Stankiewicz 2003).

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