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Editorial

Reconstructing Political Thought

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An old dualism in Political Theory is currently reoccurring in some of the methodological debates among post-positivist academic political theorists. It is the battle between those who, in the name of *Reconstructive Political Theory,* claim they have reached a new level of a sound scientific political theory and those who still want to sharpen the merits of *Political Thought* – a term which epitomizes the program of this journal, which is why we chose it as one of the three subtitles of "Redescriptions."

Those in the camp of Reconstructive Political Theory claim to represent a sounder scientific approach. They do not, however, suggest the usual positivist's toolbox of empirical and analytical methods. They are post-positivists too, and they have entered the stage of the new methodological debate in political theory from the humanities. They too make use of hermeneutics, critical language philosophy, the history of political ideas, conceptual analyses, and even *Begriffsgeschichte*. Today, the most prominent representative of Reconstructive Political Theory is Jürgen Habermas.[1] His version of Reconstructive Political Theory integrates theoretical insights from very diverse sources, the most important being Marxism's evolutionary perspective, John Dewey's pragmatism, the Critical Theory of the early Frankfurt School, Niklas Luhmann's systems theory, and certain strands of feminism.

Habermas represents an approach in modern political theory that claims to analyze the necessary social conditions for the emergence of certain political concepts and normative political statements in a systematic way. Thus he tries to explain the emergence and the performativity of political concepts and normative political statements within the framework of a theory of society, which is based on the idea of a systematic process of social evolution.[2] Political vocabularies, the definitions of political problems, as well as political interventions are understood as integral parts of an evolutionary development to higher cognitive and moral levels. Reconstructive Political Theorists in the tradition of Habermas such as Hauke Brunkhorst or Rainer Schmalz-Bruns try to connect

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certain evolutionary levels of social organization with cognitive schemes in the field of politics, they praise political "progress" and criticize what they view as "regressive," and they attempt to identify political activists with emancipatory potential. Their theoretical claims are both empirical and normative, and their chosen rhetoric is the language of modern social sciences with its explanatory style. Reconstructive Political Theorists defend a privileged epistemic position. They postulate that their theoretical insights are different and more than just subjective interpretations, personal political opinions, or collected subjective reports of political experiences. Giving their theoretical insights empirical backing is important in their view, but only if the empirical facts are generated in a certain scientific way and if they can be placed correctly in the overarching evolutionary scheme.

Political Thought, in contrast, has traditionally been understood as being a broader category than political theory because it takes into consideration a wider set of sources, such as literature of all sorts and works of art.[3] In the programmatic understanding of this journal, Political Thought is much more strongly focused because it also relies on a broader set of sources but it makes particular claims about the substance of political thinking: Political Thought of this sort intends to understand thinking politically with an emphasis on the idea of contingency.[4] It suggests that we comprehend the social and political world as consisting of opportunities for action, chance, new spaces for action, and the possibility of change (and the possibility that opportunities are lost too).

Among the numerous and diverse sources of this kind of Political Thought in the 20th century, the most prominent are Hannah Arendt, Isaiah Berlin, Michael J. Oakeshott, Wilhelm Hennis, Michel Foucault, Judith Shklar, Chantal Mouffe, and Quentin Skinner. Political Thought bears fewer similarities with the scientific approach of the natural sciences and is closer to Aesthetics or Art, where questioning the so-called merits of progress radically is still accepted. It has greater ambitions than academic Political Philosophy because it encompasses political thinking within academia and among citizens alike; it claims to be closely connected to political practice and its contingency. Advocates of Political Thought are skeptical with respect to the possibility of producing a final systematic political theory. Instead, they take into account the procedural aspects of political thinking and the role of rhetoric in the controversies about political ideas. The work they advocate puts special emphasis on particular vocabularies, on terms and concepts, and is focused on dominant as well as on marginalized or forgotten political ideas and concepts. The rhetoric of their work is mostly narrative, and it is enriched with examples and metaphors. In studying the present, Political Thought is focused on a close connection to phenomena of practical politics and the *res gerendae.* By doing so, it emphasizes the crucial role of political judgment. In studying the past, Political Thought

achieves a deeper process of politicizing by learning more about conceptual changes, through a focus on contestations about the meanings and the use of political concepts and by historicizing key concepts. By paying special attention to political conflicts caused by contingency, the historical dimension of Political Thought also contributes to training political judgment.

The role of political judgment and the place of contingency in politics lie at the heart of the differences between the two post-positivist approaches sketched above. Both topics also constitute the hidden curriculum of the four articles in this issue of "Redescriptions".

Pantelis Bassakos presents in his article "officium auditoris" the rudiments of a history of hearing in the classical debates about rhetoric and judgment. According to him, the common notion of the passive hearer can not only be found in Kant's *Kritik der Urteilskraft* (Critique of the Power of Judgment), but can be traced back to ancient sources such as Euripides' play *Hekuba* or even to some of the fragments we know from Gorgias. Against this model of the hearer, Bassakos reminds the reader that even the best rhetoric cannot persuade someone who is not willing to listen. With this insight as a starting point, Bassakos reminds us of a less common notion, namely the active hearer, and presents some findings from the history of political ideas which have contributed to this model. The active hearer is a crucial source of contingency in the interaction between the speaker and his or her audience. The role of the active hearer can already be found in some of the ancient sources. Bassakos detects it in some other fragments by Gorgias and in writings by the Italian philosopher Alessandro Piccolomini and the late Roman author Martianus Capella. He pays particular attention to *Rhetoric* by Aristotle. According to his close reading of certain parts of the book, the construction of the Aristotelian *techne* in "On Rhetoric" presupposes an active hearer, a "hearer-judge." He identifies several types of hearer-judges, some of them in a more proper, others in a somewhat derivative sense of the term. A citizen serving as juror exercises judgment, as does an adolescent receiving advice and deciding whether to follow it or not. Some translations of Aristotle's *Rhetoric* into modern languages capture the active role of the hearer, others do not and leave modern readers partly ignorant of the active role of the hearer in Aristotle's theory of judgment. Bassakos also pays particular attention to the writings of Thomas Hobbes on judgment. According to his interpretation, Hobbes has a concept of the active hearer with characteristics quite comparable to those of the Aristotelian model, introduced in a similar context, and addressing similar questions. But there is a difference: Hobbes's hearer is not a hearer of rhetoric. Hobbes distinguishes between three forms of interaction: command, counsel, and discourse – only the latter corresponding to rhetoric, as manipulation of the passive hearer. Here, rhetoric is associated exclusively with the passive hearer. Hobbes's active hearer does not obey commands, and of course cannot be manipulated by exhorta-

tion or dehortation in his or her competence to make judgments, which thus points to the contingency of political interaction.

Mikhail Ilyin presents in his article "Patrimonialism" a classical work of conceptual analysis. The word form "patrimonialism" in its various national transliterations along with its even more popular derivative "neo-patrimonialism" has been widely used in the political and social sciences and public debates for nearly five decades. The term is used as a negative characterization for certain social phenomena. Ilyin illustrates this negative use with material from recent studies on African politics. However, the common *locus classicus* for references is Max Weber. Ilyin invites us to take a deeper look into Weber's work. He shows that it was "Economy and Society" (posthumously published in 1922) that emerged as the landmark in the elaboration of a new semiotic device and the study of the very phenomenon of patrimonialism. Weber had adopted the term quite late in his academic career, only in 1914 after he had read a book on political rule in the Middle Ages by a friend and colleague of his. According to Ilyin, Weber himself never intended to sum up his previous interpretations of the patrimonial state and rule in a clear and coherent way. Ilyin collects a wide range of examples of the use of the term in the modern social sciences. He criticizes that by now the notions of patrimonialism and neo-patrimonialism have been overstretched both by further extension of the conceptual domain and by shifting a semantic focus to very specific attributes of the phenomena in question. But Ilyin also builds an interesting bridge from his conceptual analysis to reconstructive approaches in modern political theory. According to him, an evolutionary perspective on the phenomenon may help us to understand its social function and meaning. He describes patrimonialism (in the Weberian sense) as the best solution for particular social problems in the development of human societies at a certain level of evolution. Thus he claims, that "evolutionary and morphological reconstruction of the origin and essence of patrimonial rule goes well together" with Max Weber's less rigid use of the term. Taking us back to Weber's original starting point, Ilyin argues that today's scholars in the field should not only be more open in their conceptual toolkit for patrimonial hybrids, admixtures, and metamorphoses of patrimonial orders. In addition, he provocatively advises modern social scientists to follow Weber's path and be more open to the functional advantages of patrimonialism, in particular with respect to its potential for stabilizing new democratic orders.

Jacek Kornak in his article about Judith Butler's conceptual politics continues Julian Honkasalo's discussion on queer politics in "Redescriptions."[5] Kornak closely follows the uses of the term "queer" in Judith Butler's work, starting with her 1990 book "Gender Trouble," her "Bodies that Matter" (1993), "Excitable Speech" (1997), "Antigone's Claim" (2000) through "Undoing Gender" (2004). Many authors who write about queer theory today associate one particular theme of "Gender Trouble" with "queer," and that is Butler's con-

cept of performativity and the critique of the subject. Kornak claims, however, that in Butler's work neither of these two themes is directly related to the concept of "queer." Kornak shows that Butler's uses of the term "queer" change significantly within her rich work. According to his interpretation, Butler proposes no theory of "queer," nor is "queer" a central term in her writing. Instead, the term plays an important role in politicizing other issues such as class or race. His key argument is that to Butler, "queer" is a term that can be attached to various issues and can serve several political purposes. It is a term that can reveal limitations of the current political practices and thus generate space for contingency. Rather than offering one specific use of "queer," Butler attaches the term to various political issues and presents it as an open signifier that broadens the cognitive horizon in the process of making judgments. It gains its meaning through different semantic positions and different reiterations. But Kornak insists that Butler does not aim at opening up all identity concepts, but that this is possible only to some extent and that the possibilities are not endless. At the same time Kornak refers to a passage in Butler's work where she mentions in the context of "queer" "the normativity of its own terms".[6] So "queer" should be understood as a tool for challenging the symbolic system from within. According to Kornak, Butler argues for an immanent critique in several of her texts, and he states that "queer" might be a helpful term in "developing a new normativity"; her work is understood as proposing a variant of deconstructive analysis, but one which at the same time points toward a constructive politics. Such an interpretation puts Butler's work and her radical political criticism closer to certain approaches of Reconstructive Political Theory, such as the version recently suggested by Axel Honneth.[7]

Anna Kronlund's article is titled "Cultivation of Collective Judgement" and deals with the debates in the US Congress about waging war in Libya (2011) and Syria (2013). Her article continues a series of analyses of parliamentary practices in "Redescriptions" over the last decade and is connected to Teemu Häkkinen's contribution on the Concept of the Royal Prerogative in parliamentary debates on the deployment of the military in the British House of Commons, which was published last year.[8] The question at stake in the Congressional debates is whether and when the President of the United States of America should seek Congressional authorization for the use of the armed forces. Kronlund argues that although Congress has constitutionally established war powers, they are nevertheless manifested contingently. Party alliances do not explain the positions of the individual members of Congress. And any purely legalistic interpretation or view of war powers in the US is problematic too, since the powers are interpreted, defined, and used in different political contexts. The collective judgment of the members of Congress is challenged by the contingency of both the political situation and their political vocabulary. The characteristics of wars and conflicts have changed drasti-

cally since the 1970s, when the War Powers Resolution (WPR, 1973) and the National Emergency Act (NEA, 1976) were enacted, and therefore the debates on the concepts and conceptions, such as war itself and the related powers, will likely continue and leave the question on the involvement of Congress in the decision-making processes on war power open and to be contested in the future.

The articles in this issue of "Redescriptions" indicate that the two camps, Political Thought of the kind mentioned above and Reconstructive Political Theory, do not necessarily have to be exclusive to each other. It is possible to build bridges between the two camps by learning from each other. Political Thought may learn from the perspective of Reconstructive Political Theory to take normative questions more seriously and to make more use of forms of immanent critique; Reconstructive Political Theory may learn to take into consideration more seriously the relevance of political vocabularies and their notoriously unstable semantics as well as the contingency of political interaction and action. When it comes to political interventions, the advocates of both camps are often already much closer to each other than they like to admit.

The current debate on the future of the European Union may serve as an example of the existence of some overlapping consensus among them: Whereas Jürgen Habermas defends his call for deeper European integration on the basis of his reconstructive interpretation of the integration process since the late 1950s,[9] Kari Palonen points directly to the creation of a new sense of contingency which can be observed both by professional politicians and by those whom Max Weber had called "occasional politicians," the citizens.[10] Despite their differences, both Habermas and Palonen share the view that nowadays the European Union is a major agency of politicization. Both are critical of today's passive politicization which has appeared rather as a by-product of European integration – and both agree in calling for active politicization at the level of the EU's political system.

Endnotes

1 On Habermas's reconstructive methodology see: Jorgen Pedersen (2009), "Habermas' Method. Rational Reconstruction," in: *Philosophy of the Social Sciences* 38, 457-485; William Outhwaite (2014), "Reconstructive Science and Methodological Dualism in the Work of Jürgen Habermas." In: Philosophical Inquiry 38, 2-18.

2 See the two volumes of his "Theory of Communicative Action" (1981).

3 See Henning Ottmann (1996), "In eigener Sache: Politisches Denken", in: Jahrbuch Politisches Denken 1, 1-9; Michael Freeden (2013), The Political Theory of Political Thinking. The Anatomy of a Practice. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

4 See Tuija Pulkkinen (2014), "Editorial," in: Redescriptions 17:1, 5-9.
5 See Julian Honkasalo (2014): "Hannah Arendt as an ally for queer politics?" In: Redescriptions 17:2, 180-200.
6 Judith Butler (1993), Bodies that Matter. New York: Routledge, page 111.
7 See: Axel Honneth (2014), Freedom's Right. New York: Columbia University Press.
8 See: Teemu Häkkinen (2014): "The Concept of the Royal Prerogative in Parliamentary Debates on the Deployment of Military in the British House of Commons 1982-2003". In: Redescriptions 17:2, 160-179.
9 See: Jürgen Habermas (2015), „Warum der Ausbau der Europäischen Union zu einer supranationalen Demokratie nötig und wie er möglich ist", in: Leviathan 42, 524-538. On the crucial role of the reconstructive approach for Habermas's political interventions in the case of the EU, see: Daniel Gaus (2013), "Rational Reconstruction as a Method between Social Critique and Empirical Political Science". In: Constellations 20, 79-91.
10 See: Kari Palonen (2014): "Editorial – The European Union as an Agency of Politicisation." In Redescriptions 17:2, 134-139.