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DIMENSIONS OF POLITICS

A Critique of the Common One-dimensional Concept of Politics

Politics is too often regarded as a poor relation, inherently dependent and subsidiary; it is rarely praised as something with a life and character of its own.

Bernhard Crick (1993, 15)

At first glance, today it seems almost ridiculous to pretend that even in present times of “globalization” politics still plays the essential role in shaping the future of human welfare and societies; a role and function it gained only during the formation of a specific historical type of society for which I therefore have proposed the name “political society.”¹ In contradiction to this, for some years in almost all public discussions as well as in most scientific analyses the assumed evidence of a decisive and irreversible dominant role of economic processes and developments seem to have been overriding any other perspective. According to this common sense politics has recently abdicated and surrendered its former capacity of guidance and government to the anonymous forces of “disembedded global markets.” Politics, according to this actual ideology, is thus left only in the place of a reactive repair-workshop, at best able to soften the disastrous impacts of the global economy on various local social and cultural structures.

What would be at stake, if this pretention was true, is more or less the central idea of democratic government that citizens by exercis-

ing their political rights and liberties and through a complex set of institutions, by various organisations and by taking part in formal and informal procedures can have a substantial impact on the character and normative status of their regime and the policies this regime will choose to implement.² As will be briefly remembered at the end of this contribution, it might be even their freedom, which will be lost. What is without any doubt at stake in the present disputes is the consciousness of human selfdetermination in history which in the modern democratic perception after the American and French revolutions definitely never has been absolute and without the recognition of all kinds of constraints, but which since then cannot be completely given up, if the idea of democracy is to keep some substantial meaning, which would go beyond the mere electoral recruitment of governing elites. As Zygmunt Bauman puts it: "The human condition is not pre-empted by its past. Human history is not predetermined by its past stages. The fact that something has been the case, even for a very long time, is not the proof that it will continue to be so. Each moment of history is a junction of tracks leading towards numbers of futures. Being at the crossroads is the way human society exists. What appears in retrospect an 'inevitable' development began in its time as stepping onto one road among the many stretching ahead" (Bauman 1988, 89). So any kind of "structural" determinism, by economy or more recently genetics, as well as any kind of "development" or "evolution," which does not leave at least a nontrivial realm for human choice and political action determining the regime itself, finally fails to understand human history properly and cannot be the epistemological and practical foundation of democracy.

As common and popular ideas along the line of the globalization-argument have become, even in serious scientific publications, as rare until today remain analytically sound works of research which try to support the presumed evidence of the impact of "globalization" on politics³ by indicator-based empirical research. Those projects, which at least tried what could finally be done with more perfection only by a compelling and longlasting integrated collective research cooperation at international level, have immediately produced serious doubts about the pretended character and dimension of those processes and changes. Some of the often heard common-

sense-indicators for the globalization-thesis prove false if tested in a stricter sense. Most important: the “de-nationalization” of certain dimensions of politics and policy-making as a presumed consequence of “globalization” does not at all equal with the assumed abdication of politics or any complete loss of future potential for political governance (Zürn 1998). In some fields, as for instance in the European Union, national governments are even gaining increasing independence from the structures of responsiveness established in national representative democracies. Within the European Union itself the Council, the Commission, and the European Central Bank represent transnational agencies of substantive political power; while the European Union is just an example of a very visible and institutionalized transnational political agency, there exists a whole bulk of others not very accessible for public recognition. “De-nationalization” thus seems to coincide with a de-parliamentarization inside of democratic nation-states, but not automatically with a retreat of political regulation of others kinds. Other levels and structures of governance and thus dominance and politics appear beyond the nation-state and respective democratic systems of responsible government. And while the role of nation-states and national governance institutions and structures changes, it does not just disappear in the rapid process of transnationalization of politics (Greven/Pauly 2000). We thus experience an historical change of the formal, institutional, and informal aspects of politics inside and beyond the common nation-state and new levels of policy-formation and governance are added to those already present at national and subnational level. The power relations between these levels of policy formation and execution are in a dynamic development and it will be finally an empirical question to find answers as to where today and in the near future the “real powers” are or will be located.⁴

Consequently, the relation between politics and “globalization” thus is far more complex as presumed in the popular deterministic scenarios and in certain aspects “globalization” seems even to be initiated and voluntarily set into practice by political choice.

The dominant so-called “neoliberal” discourse, claiming the vanishing role of government and politics altogether in a “free world” of “free global markets”⁵ has neither an appropriate understanding of markets nor of politics as a fundamental *condition humane*⁶ which

will not and cannot just more or less disappear, because some herolds of certain economic and cultural practices are for the time being very successful in framing the worldview of intellectual and public media. Since politics⁷ is my concern in this contribution - just a few brief remarks about markets: as everybody could know ever since Adam Smith and Karl Marx, markets have to become established, put into practice and remain protected by “external” factors they cannot provide for by themselves⁸, namely law and politics; the former being a more or less contingent result of the latter in modern political societies. Even if we still do not have enough empirical research for any detail yet, we never the less have no serious reason to belief that these statements will one day prove to be wrong at the new transnational or global level. Consequently the term “disembedded markets” formulates a truism only with reference to a concept of nationally disembedded markets⁹ without even asking the immediately arising question of the new structures, institutions and actors which actually and in future potentially form the new “bed” for global or at least transnational markets. Since at no level markets can by themselves provide their preconditions, the fundamentals in their relation to politics remain the same, but the forms and institutions of markets and politics change at these new levels as well as – in consequence – at the older ones.

So while there does not seem to exist much new in the fundamental relationship between markets and politics the real problem today is to keep our understanding of politics *uptodate*. If we will not be successful in doing so we will also not be able to develop forms and strategies of political practice for tackling the consequences of a “globalization” which then will continue to appear as an economic process only. What in the forgoing sentence at first glance seems like a logic circle is in fact the result of the epistemological and in practice contingent character of politics. Politics as a concept of understanding and politics as a concept of practice are themselves part of the same reality which they try to understand or to influence.¹⁰ And while on the one hand the kind of understanding, whether in the empirical political culture of the people or in the more theoretical way of political science¹¹, cannot in a strict sense determine political practice, it is obvious on the other hand that no political practice

can act beyond that realm of common consciousness which incorporates the political culture of a society. The reason is that politics is always a somehow intentional and thus conscious form of common practice – and not just behaviour, which also plays a role, but cannot by itself constitute politics.

For rendering a given situation “political” through “politicization” at first the consciousness of its non-selfevidence has to appear. Only then and if the consciousness becomes present and common that this very situation also could be different, the possibility and potential for politics arises. I call this epistemological precondition of politics contingency. It has quite different consequences for the past, the present and the future. In relation to the past people may become aware that what once happened to them was not at all been destiny but the result of somebody’s decisions and actions. This knowledge never the less in the present always comes too late: the past remains the past. But the way people have learned to view their past has much to do with their present degree of freedom. The present finally counts, because only the present – fluid as it is: no *status* but a permanent flow of events and perceptions – turns contingency into a practical dimension, opens the very possibility of influencing the future; something, which can be done only in the present. This contingency as an epistemological and practical prerequisite of politics has not to be confounded with the historical concept and consciousness of “malleability”¹²; while the former refers to the consciousness of actors in their consciousness, the latter refers to the perception of a situation and its evaluation as changeable by instrumental action in the sense of the Greek word *téchne*. The difference, abstract as it seems, is of practical relevance because also actors with a principle consciousness of contingency, i.e. modern *homini politici*, will at a given time evaluate some circumstances and situations still as not malleable and therefore not political; this judgement then reflects not only a judgement about the objective, but also about the subject’s potentials and possibilities of dealing with it. The politicization¹³ thus relates for at least certain relevant actors or groups of actors the emergent knowledge of contingency with the belief of the malleability of a given situation in the future. The very process of politicization thus may become the battlefield of different groups in the specific sense that some claim that certain situations are not open for politicization while others do; but the former “conservative” per-

spective then has already lost its earlier convincing while unconscious prevalence. Once a situation has become recognized as contingent, even those who are not convinced are left with no other practical option as to argue in the public battlefield of politics – and thus contribute to the politicization themselves.

Societies in history then can be compared according to the scope of contingency and malleability they consciously realize. In a political society virtually every social relation, institution, organisation, in brief, all conditions of human¹⁴ life seem to be contingent and thus open to political dispute and decision. “Life,” “age,” “sex,” even the “climate” or “weather” today have become political concepts, open to disputes and conflicts and depending on political or legal regulation which in pluralistic societies never can settle such dissent once and for all – but always only until a new decision will be taken. “Validity” in political societies thus has become absolutely and exclusively depending on contingent political decision making and beyond this the single remaining definite *condition humaine* is the common recognition of relativism. Without systematically referring to a definite theoretical concept of the present society like for instance “political society” Georg Kohler is right in stating: “...the political is not any longer a subsystem besides other social systems, but the place at which through communicative power, experience and reason decisions about the limitations and general authorizations of all other social systems are taken.”¹⁵

The recognition of contingency in a political society by itself refers to a complex situation which can analytically be distinguished into three levels:

- At the first level we can empirically observe what in a present situation of a society is by tradition and routine undisputably recognized as political; being political in this sense means that it is accepted in this society, that regulations are necessary and could be found and put into practice only by the legitimate political process institutionalized in that society; we may call this the cognitive aspects of its political culture and from a comparative diachronical or synchronical perspective we then will find political cultures which are more or less inclusive; less inclusive would be those political cultures in which a minor number of situations, issues and problems are recognized and practically treated as political.

- At the second level we can empirically observe that a quarrel may take place between relevant actors about the question, whether certain situations, issues and problems are political at all; those who would support the political option and – if impertinent enough – thus *defacto* politicize the question for all, claim that in future binding or common solutions in this question ought to be found by the political process and that traditions or customs or the like in future would not only longer settle the issue; but never the less, beyond the cognitive aspect, on the procedural and institutional level of politics of a given society it remains still a contingent question whether enough support and resources will turn such a claim into a success; a success would mean that in the institutionalised political decision-making process this new question will in future be routinely treated and settled by a decision – but not necessarily with results which the former supporters of the issue would accept. And since the contingency of political decisions is inevitable also after they once have been taken, we will also find the reverse process: actors or groups who claim that issues formerly settled by political regulations should in future not be solved that way. Putting it this way makes one immediately aware, that the popular talk about “deregulation” or “privatization” refers to a certain type of political action and political decision, namely the political decision not to use political decisions for regulating a certain field of action in the next future. So, in a political society even the non-political spheres are constituted by political decisions – as it is well recognized in the most prominent example of the human rights.

- Finally and probably most controversial, we at least should try to imagine¹⁶ issues which at present are not recognized as political by anyone but may become so in the future; obviously the assumption of such an imaginative level of future contingency is at first nothing but an abstract deduction and consequence of the basic assumption of my own theory about the political character of present modern societies and the argument thus seems to be caught in a circle. The thesis that in this type of society *virtually* every issue is political and thus can *defacto* become politicized is not in the strict textbook sense an empirical statement; it is an evaluative historical judgement which claims validity and plausibility in the same sense as concepts like “modern society” do.

Maybe I should try to demonstrate these distinct levels of politicization with examples. On the first level – and supposedly least controversial – we will find in modern societies the whole corpus of positive law, in which earlier law-producing political decisions of the legislative bodies¹⁷ of that society are laid down. Even if

after some time the impression may be widely spread that no alternative exists to the very way, in which issues and situations have been regulated by law¹⁸, today everybody at least in principle must recognize the complete positive character of such a body of regulations. It is true that the production of formal law and legal regulations can also be seen as actual depoliticization¹⁹ of formerly controversial and conflictual issues; but this depoliticization through legislation always remains temporary and precarious and works as such only until new a dispute arises – which in turn is made more likely if and when people are and remain aware of the political decisions behind the legal regulations.

Once a legal regulation exists then in principle a situation is given, that this regulation could also be changed by decisions of the legislative bodies or the authorities involved. It is exactly the complete body of positive law in a given historical society, as juridical and unpolitical it may appear, which thus reflects the dimensions and range of the political culture of a specific society – and its contingency at once. If we compare this legal body of western societies at various stages of its development ever since the early nineteenth century, using its volume as indicator for the range of issues formally politicised, we will find empirical evidence for the impressively growing inclusiveness of the political process leading to a situation which then could be evaluated as political society. Nevertheless, comparing different societies today, we will also find that this inclusiveness varies in degree. Certain issues may have been regulated by political decisions here – but not everywhere. Examples in different spheres of criminal or public law are for instance recent German laws concerning violence between husband and wife²⁰ or between parents and children²¹ as a means of education, the ban of nuclear power plants “for all future” by the recent German governing coalition or women’s right for legal abortion in former East, but not in West Germany – or the legal ban of smoking in public places in some US-American States. Especially the recent political debate about the future of West-European welfare systems, including radical proposals of a complete withdrawal of public unemployment allowances are significant examples for the irreducible contingency of political regulation; even after almost half a century these citizen rights in the Marshallian sense are at any time disposable to political majorities. If

we even remember the “dark” history of the last century, we must remain absolutely aware of the contingency²² of the most fundamental political institutions and individual rights; in political societies, against a massive political movement no other defensive forces exist but political ones.

As has been already stated, the most difficult intellectual task would be to imagine the politicization of a situation or issue which never before has been seen as a political one by anybody. If one tries one immediately has to recognize that especially since the last century almost everything somewhere has already been politicized by somebody, whether we screen the spheres of economy, religion²³, science, or *nota bene* art, education and more general culture. Not always has this claim been successful in the sense that legal regulation now exists and in some cases the former result of a successful politicization has been withdrawn by deregulation. The history of socialism in its political and theoretical core and claim is a history about the democratic or undemocratic politicization of economic structures and processes. Where a “socialist” economy formerly had been introduced, as was the case in the Sowjet Union, it had been the result of political decisions – and the same holds true for its reversal and the establishment of a capitalist market economy. Since modern feminism in the late sixties claimed “The private is political” the very distinction and borderlining between the private and the public sphere not only in “gender issues” has become all over the world a major political conflict and concepts formerly perceived as “natural” like “male” and “female” have become reflexive in public and in turn all of a sudden needed legal definitions and regulations – including the recognition of “transsexual” identities and “queer-studies.” Niklas Luhmann, despite of the different fundamentals and aprioris of his systems theory, sometimes describes the ubiquity of political decisions in democracies in a way most similar to my version of political society: “...everything which happens on the agenda of politics, becomes a decision... This universalism of decisionism reaches its perfection in the scheme of democracy, which using the code government/opposition quasi by routine and almost unreflectively takes care that everything which politics wants to see as decision also can be represented accordingly.”²⁴

The question remains: Is there anything left today in this type of society for which no public regulation exists or has at least already been demanded by somebody? I can't imagine anything.

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In this contribution up to this point I have been using a concept of politics not very explicitly elaborated. For the purpose of better understanding I started with a vague meaning of the concept by which its dominant present sense in political science and the political society should be adequately represented. I call it the functionalist concept of politics and it is very well known in the definition given to it by David Easton: "what distinguishes political interactions from all other kinds of social interactions is that they are predominantly oriented toward the authoritative allocation of values for a society" (1965, 50). Despite the popularity of this concept even in approaches different from the Eastonian version of systems analysis, the consequences of the functionalist background in this view are too often neglected. According to this approach political action has no aim or *telos* in itself, as inherently proclaimed in the motto to this text by Bernhard Crick, but serves other purposes in an instrumental orientation. Using Aristotele's distinction, Easton and the common use of politics in political science today refers not to *praxis* but to *téchne*. As such, politics is predominantly perceived as a kind of problem-solving action or process. In this process human interaction and the organizations and institutions framing and enabling it immediately fall under the jurisdiction of a certain concept of rationality, which is, by and large, the economic principle of effectiveness: how to get things done with a minimum of scarce resources. Not by accident then especially governmental politics and policies at the first glance more and more resemble the patterns of action known from big companies – and a somehow emerging new class of top politicians recently seems not any longer to take the difference between running a company and a democratic government very seriously.

Before political scientists with different approaches and especially divergent normative understandings of politics start with their regular academic critique of this type of popular politics they ought just for a moment hesitate and start to reflect also upon the fact that

especially in modern mass democracies this instrumental approach to politics as a means to reach out for other goals is not a privilege of ruling elites and governments but seems to reflect also the aspirations and demands of significant proportions of the population – the so-called *citizens*. As abundant comparative empirical research demonstrates, big majorities in western democracies are from a republican point of view de facto nothing but *clients*, who demand exactly this type of instrumental expert government and what ever they see as a proper solution of problems through what ever kind of political regulation. In a democratic regime everybody who opposes in theory or praxis this style and quality of dominant politics in these societies thus easily runs into a normative trap: if the system is really responsive in at least some general manner then the government cannot be blamed alone for a situation which contradicts the normative or evaluative standards of some theoretical approaches. The real situation in present democratic societies, properly described, and not the theories seems to be aporetic: if not only some normative democratic theories presuppose *citoyens* in a republican tradition but the constitutions and more or less official creeds²⁵ of western democracies themselves then their absence could not be compensated by “democratic” elites who, neglecting the normative democratic demand for participation, de facto substitute the actual failure of citizenship by some kind of advocacy elite behaviour. Either the normative demands referring to a republican concept of citizenship or the claim for responsive government then must in practice be denied. If the democratic elites would choose to give normative priority to the republican elements in their normative foundations they would have to become critics more than representatives of their fellow countrymen. Given this aporetic situation, it seems to be evident that in the political reality of present mass democracies we find more and decisive elements of a responsive electoral system of democratic representation as we find rudiments of republican citizenship participation; the latter forms of politics, whether we like it or not, are more present at local levels and in accidental forms of dissent and protest behaviour. Their impact on the routines of the political process may become important once in a while, but the structures and routines of the regime are not essentially shaped from this marginal edge of the political society. As has been mentioned earlier in this contribution,

theoretical statements and judgements on politics are themselves part of the political communication of the political society. If they reach beyond mere descriptive statements they become political positions with reference to a given status quo as well.²⁶ In consequence of these brief considerations much of today's normative democratic theory – what ever else its professional or scientific status may be – in political societies is part of a political opposition against the dominant societal understanding of democratic government; less than explaining it, these theories try to influence political communication as part of a somehow republican and more participatory opposition. In as much as this normative literature refers today in a positive manner directly to the already mentioned explicit 'republican' claims in constitutional documents and the propagated political creed of western democracies it tends to have forgotten what during other periods of *critical* democratic theory²⁷ had been the task of a critique of ideology. One has to become aware of this status of large sections of normative political theory today to avoid the misunderstanding that a proper analysis and understanding of given democratic regimes in present political societies results from there. On the contrary, essential parts of normative democratic theory in political science do not at all contribute to the understanding and explanation of real political systems and processes.

Turning back to political science literature on present politics and political systems the at least immanent functional approach is clearly dominant. It more and more resembles a special branch of (public) business administration. While one-dimensional models of human behaviour in the *homo oeconomicus* tradition²⁸ have for a long time been contested by mixed-motive-approaches these policy studies in political science usually unreflectedly pretend that egoism is the only valid single motive for the "explanation" of human conduct – be it of individuals or collective actors of the type 'interest groups.' Strangely enough then, analytically modelling the praxis of governments or 'the state,' it's all of a sudden not any longer egoism but 'common good' or 'rational problem solving' which is the apriori attributed motive of action.

Being usually in its empirical case studies not uncritical against the strategies and instruments of governments and the ways in which

“the political system” is tackling policy-problems of societies, this approach thus tacitly implies a more or less uncritical identification with a ‘governmentalistic’ perspective or point of view. This identification very often starts already with the definition of the problem, continues in a limitizing view at the instruments of (governmental) policy interventions and ends up too often with an evaluation of the political outcome which remains restricted to the (governmental) programming and definition of aims at the starting point of the ‘policy-circle.’²⁹ This uncritical identification with the policy centres of a society³⁰ and their programmes is not given up and hardly modified in substance, when for instance Renate Mayntz and Fritz W. Scharpf³¹ in their research are working with corporatist or network concepts or “actor-oriented institutionalism” (Scharpf 2000). Either by empirical observation or by more theoretical, even normative presuppositions “the state” or the government in this approach is observed as just one participant in bargaining or arguing processes with other important collective actors of the specific policy domain and the assumption is that successful cooperation in networks or the corporatist informal arrangements creates more rational and more effective ways of government and problem-solving than a hierarchical strategy of decision-making could ever achieve. Thus the normative orientation and perspective still remains governmental – even when the government is not any longer perceived as an omnipotent actor within a society who could reign it successfully top-down .³²

My objection here does not aim against a subfield of policy studies within the study and theory of politics which can contribute valuable knowledge about reforms or the value of instruments of an interventionist policy in such fields like health or environment or traffic. My objection is critical against a threatening state of the art of political science in which this partial approach becomes so hegemonic that some specific aspects of the complex and rich reality of politics in present societies are taken *pars pro toto*. One problematic consequence is then that the whole field of politics is perceived as a field of rational behaviour – not in the sense that one is seeking scientifically for opportunities to increase rational problem-solving, but in the sense that all of a sudden such a political science is taking the supposed rational premises of governmental actors and their collaborators for granted.

But the reflection of politics in an academic discipline like political science has unfortunately no serious reasons to perceive of all politics, neither at the level of governments nor at the level of collective actors or individuals in the so-called civil society, as rational problem-solving and thus should frame its central research interests and concepts accordingly. A concept and understanding of the very notion "politics" like in David Easton's today widely accepted definition is much too one-dimensional to cover other important dimensions which are and remain essential for a more valid understanding of politics.

We do not have to remember the Holocaust for finding relevant examples of political action which under no circumstances could be conceptualized and scientifically reconstructed as rational problem solving policies; again unfortunately, this horrible kind of the inherent destructive capacities of politics in modern times did not disappear from the surface of our planet by the end of World War II and since then plenty of occasions³³ appeared in which politics developed its destructive and violent irrational potentials to a degree without precedence in earlier centuries. So, whoever talks about a "process of civilization" in an unspecific manner ought to avoid the misunderstanding that modern societies or the process of modernization has until today successfully reduced the violent potentials inherent in politics.³⁴ It must only be remembered that the population of the world is still threatened by some thousands of nuclear weapons which at the end of World War II have already shown in Hiroshima and Nagasaki how they can multiply in seconds, and with consequences enduring for at least a generation, the numbers of victims of conventional warfare. While during the period immediately following their first employment public consciousness and political thought has been quite aware of this new stage and quality in the historical development of instruments for violent politics³⁵, since then, paradoxically supported by the cold peace of the "cold war" between two blocs with functioning second-strike-capability and thus deterrence-capacity, the knowledge that these weapons are still there and always ready for use has been widely and successfully repressed. In textbooks of International Relations they are hardly mentioned any longer, while international regimes and "games of cooperation" are *à la mode*. But especially political scientists should not repress their

knowledge about two facts: that these terrible weapons have been used by a liberal democratic government and that the programme of so-called non-proliferation has turned out to be a failure. The first fact questions all optimistic ideologies, often inherent in the literature on the so-called Third Wave of Democratization³⁶, that democracies by their internal development of “civility” become quasi automatically immune against the use of such instruments of genocide; and the second fact means that successful mutual deterrence as the possibly main factor for the non-employment of these weapons during the cold war cannot any longer be used as an argument for their future non-employment. Today these weapons might also more and more easily get into the hands of so-called bandit-states or even armed factions³⁷ in civil or what has been called “new wars” (Kaldor 1999) – and their impact will be as terrible and not only local as more than fifty years ago.

So whoever wants to theorize³⁸ the human capacity for politics ought not to circumvent the problem of violence, which by itself is a reality not always and automatically synthesized with politics – but which is still the most powerful and threatening means for a wide range of political behaviour.³⁹ Even Hannah Arendt writes: “Although power and violence are phenomena of different kind they appear mostly together” (1970, 53).⁴⁰ Taking thus her realistic approach especially in the analysis of contemporary politics for granted, her fundamental message in political theory, often neglected today in her one-sided reception in neo-republican writings not only in the feminist context, hints at another dimension of politics which does not play a significant role in a political science dominated by policy-studies and the instrumental approach. In her words we can and must distinguish between the purpose, the aim and the sense or principle of politics.⁴¹ And: “The sense of something in difference to its purpose always is inherent to it and the sense of some action can only last as long as this action lasts itself” (Arendt 1993, 126).⁴² It was then her critique that “since the decades of the American Revolution” especially the latter, “the search for the principle of acting does not any longer move our thinking about politics” (1993, 130).⁴³ But what is the “principle of acting in politics?” According to her it presupposes peace or the absence of violence, recognizes the fundamental and irreducible pluralism

between individuals, because they are different, thus tries to establish the coacting and living together of different people who treat themselves as equals and in doing so realize their freedom – whatever the contingent content of this spontaneous coaction in accordance with these principles may be. This is the context in which one must try to understand her sentence: “The sense of politics is freedom” (Arendt 1993, 28) and “freedom does only exist in the peculiar in-between-space of politics” (Arendt 1993, 12).⁴⁴ One radical consequence of this dimension of the understanding of politics is that human freedom in the strict sense exists only in and during political action and, since many people in present representative mass democracies rarely experience this during their life, that freedom today is still a privilege of minorities. “Freedom was born as a privilege and has remained so ever since” states Zygmunt Bauman (1988, 9).⁴⁵ What liberal democracies with their, at best, responsive system of mass representation by professional politicians can only bring into existence are what Isaiah Berlin distinguished as negative liberties from positive ones (1969). Only citizens politically coacting with others can establish their freedom and only in their common pursuit of freedom the sense of politics is actualized. I leave out here the interesting question whether the professional political action which forms the daily routine of the actual political elites in western democracies, could be seen as a separate quasi-*polis* in which the politicians as citizens realize this dimension of politics exclusively among or “in-between” themselves. What is important in my context is that this dimension of politics in principle does not coincide with the dominant instrumental or functional understanding of politics in policy science. “Politics of identity” of social movements, mobilized ethnicities or regions (Schmidtke 1996) or the politicization of life styles (Ritter 1997) are examples recently discussed in this respect.

The slogan “The private is political” at the end of the sixties was not the only one: even less instrumental already then people believed: “Wrongly live those who don’t defend themselves.”⁴⁶ From here a line could be drawn to versions of common cultural dissent and protest behaviour of groups and milieus which are not always treated as political by political science.

Starting with the present discourse on “globalization” which often implies the idea of a secular abdication of politics I tried to illustrate that political science today is in danger of becoming nothing else but a branch of (public) business administration thus limiting the scope of its understanding of politics to a specific version of purpose-rational action. Remembering extreme forms of political action which by no means deserve the judgement as “rational” I briefly sketched out the still essential connection between politics and if not the actual employment then at least the permanent threat and preparation of the use of violent means without precedence in human history. Both these dimensions of politics in political science are usually seen from a restricted perspective focussed on governmental politics and policies and thus in permanent danger of an unconscious identification with the normative aims and the specific criteria for “rationality” of those who govern. Political science then loses its possible and in my eyes even necessary critical distance and becomes affirmative with a situation in which not only rational problem-solving via policies is on the agenda, but still human domination and if not exploitation then at least redistribution; those who govern never lose in this respect and beyond those there always exist winners and losers of politics. This is true not only in a materialistic sense but also with reference to the justification of norms and principles which in our days of political societies is – as far as public norms and sanctions are concerned – not any longer the business of churches or ‘ethic commissions’ but of politics and political decision-making. Finally I touched an understanding of politics which according to my judgement is not – as it seems at first glance – ‘old fashioned’ and ‘out of time.’ May be that just a very traditionalistic political science is not any longer sensible for appearances of politics beyond its perception of the “political system” and especially has lost all contacts to certain branches of cultural studies or other fields of social science which observe human behaviour and common forms of action as if they were political. This is especially true and most evident when cultural studies look into protest cultures of young people. But there exist other, less evident and spectacular examples: if some hundred persons who think that the tax-load is unjust form an interest associa-

tion and start lobbying for their aims, political science would be prepared to subsume this in its subfield interest mediation and research on interest groups; but if some millions of citizens of a society, perceiving that their tax-load is unjust, by routine and all the time try to illegally diminish their legal tax-load political science either ignores this or understands it as “private” criminal action. At the other hand, when some proportion of the population demonstrates antisemitic prejudices in questionnaires individually completed this immediately would be taken as a political factum. The only thing I wanted to make aware of is: the traditional routines of political science exclusively choosing subjects of reflection and research need examination. One way how this choice and selection is more or less unconsciously made is the unreflected use of certain concepts of politics.

This choice of concepts and their popularization with the *aura* of science can by itself be reflected as a kind of action which shapes the political “in-between” or public space which then is our “world;” in the words of Kari Palonen it is thus by itself a way of “politicking” (Palonen 2000, 7). The aforementioned abdication of politics in the rhetorics of political scientists is the result of such processes and thus contributes to a situation which it believes just to analyze

Notes

¹ See the full argument in Greven (1999) and some applications of it to more specific matters in Greven (2000); in this contribution I try to specify some questions around the present use of the very concept “politics” – both in political science as well as in practical political discourse – without referring in more detail to the underlying assumptions of the theory of political societies. Please be always aware that I’m not using the concept for a functional subsystem or part of societies but as a characteristic of certain type of societies – like in “industrial society” or more recently “risk society.”

² The term “regime” in this sentence takes the place of “politeia” in the first paragraph of Aristotle’s book on “politics” (1943) – which despite of this reflected a completely different understanding of the role of “politics.”

³ Be aware that altogether I do not question the idea of a new quality of economic interdependence with the tendency – not yet reality – of “global

sourcing, global pricing, global costing" (Altvater/Mahnkopf 1996, 41); my subject is the relation of these processes to the role and potential of politics which is in most of those popular essays only deducted from these evident facts.

⁴For an interesting analytically complex approach to these new forms of politics see Forschungsgruppe Weltgesellschaft 1996 and Brock 2000.

⁵Interestingly enough, not only hardliners of liberalism but also the remains of orthodox marxist or marxist-leninist "base-superstructure" determinism contribute to the present talk of the end of politics and governance; while ideologically fighting against the "neoliberalists" those former or present orthodox marxists pretend that they have always known everything better as concerns the economic determination of politics (and culture, and ...everything else).

⁶In the sense of such various, in details quite often strictly opposed, authors like Hannah Arendt, Bernhard Crick, Max Horkheimer, C. Wright Mills, Carl Schmitt, Jean Paul Sartre, Max Weber, and *tutti quanti*.

⁷"Politics are refers... to 'that which belongs to polis'..., 'that which belongs to the subject area of the discipline Politics... *Politics* is refers to a concept for which the grammatical plural has lost its significance," "when politics is understood as action" (Palonen 1993, 9).

⁸For a recent discussion of these aspects see for example the contributions in R. Czada/S. Lütz (2000).

⁹A truism in the recent popular debate, based on a wrong perception not at all present in Karl Polanyi's often quoted but rarely read book "The Great Transformation" (1978).

¹⁰In the sense of Niklas Luhmann according to whom "theories about the society are also theories in the society" and therefore a "transcendental" position in the Kantian sense is a fiction which cannot any longer function as a common ground of cognition. (Luhmann 1990).

¹¹It is not quite evident that political science as an academic discipline today has much influence in framing and forming a society's consciousness and concept of politics – but the academic discourse as a whole – most prominently law and economics – definitely does.

¹²My translation for Christian Meiers illuminating German neologism "*Könnens-bewußtsein*" (1983, 469 - 499)

¹³As can be seen, in this case I do not agree with Kari Palonen's statement "*politisieren* in German only refers to talking about politics" (1993, 10); in fact ever since the times of the student's movement and the APO in the late sixties the German term "*politisieren*" has meant always more, i.e. rendering a situation into a political one which thus needs political solutions by authoritative decision or consensus-oriented discourse; conservative critics at that time did confirm my reading (Hennis 1970);

as can be also seen, Kari's and my approach, analytically and normatively dedicated towards "politicking and politization," never the less do very much coincide.

¹⁴ Note that even the term *condition human*, in its classical use referring to ontological or anthropological preconditions of human existence, in modern selfreflective societies has become contingent; as present debates about "cognition" or "genetics" openly reflect, the recognized validity of concepts like "dignity of the individual", "integrity" or even "individual" in political societies can only be the result of political decisions.

¹⁵ My translation from: "...ist also das Politische nicht mehr ein Subsystem neben anderen sozialen Systemen, sondern der Ort, an dem durch kommunikative Macht, Erfahrung und Vernunft über die Grenzen und allgemeinen Berechtigungen der anderen gesellschaftlichen Sphären entschieden wird" (Kohler 1999, 61).

¹⁶ Political Science today very often lacks imagination.

¹⁷ I use the plural, because besides parliaments in parliamentary democracies in many cases also certain courts act as legislators; if we include legal regulations with authoritative character issued by certain bureaucratic institutions like tax authorities or the governments themselves, the political and contingent quality immediately becomes more evident.

¹⁸ This is an illusion which turns especially advocates and bureaucrats into representatives of some kind of a superficial "retraditionalization" of (positive) law and themselves into a class of its priestermen.

¹⁹ N. Luhman (2000, 80) uses the concept "indirect politization" to hint at the political character of "juridification" (my translations).

²⁰ In comparative perspective probably a good indicator for inclusiveness of the political process.

²¹ A similar proposition by the Blair Government has not been successful in the British Parliament.

²² In a less political and more sociological perspective Zygmunt Bauman (1992) refers to this historical sensibility with the term "ambivalence."

²³ It's not only religion, today it's also the very concept of "God" ("Godess") in Christian theology and faith (Matthiae 1999).

²⁴ "... wird damit alles, was im Themenkreis von Politik geschieht, zur Entscheidung... Dieser Universalismus der Entscheidungsunterstellung erreicht seine Perfektion im Demokratieschema, das durch den Code Regierung/Opposition quasi routinemäßig und fast unreflektiert dafür sorgt, daß alles, was die Politik als Entscheidung sehen will, auch so dargestellt werden kann" (Luhmann 2000, 86).

²⁵ Used here in the sense of Gunnar Myrdals famous study of the "American Dilemma," first published in 1944, (1969).

- ²⁶ Given the professional scientific language and abstract content of most of these contributions their effect on the real political process never the less is normally neglectable.
- ²⁷ Just to mention one name of this kind of critical approach, very prominently in international political science communications only some twenty years ago, hardly to be found in today's overviews about "democratic theory," C.B. Macpherson, see for instance (1973).
- ²⁸ A tradition which, as all tradition, is a fabrication, neglecting for instance the mixed-motive perspective of the founding father of modern economics Adam Smith (Schultheiss 1999, 118-135).
- ²⁹ This description of an approach as much differentiated and elaborated over the years comes close to a caricature and is necessarily unfair to highly sophisticated *and* critical works as for example carried out by many members of the Max Planck Institut für Gesellschaftsforschung at Cologne, namely Renate Mayntz and Fritz W. Scharpf – who never the less in principle share the characteristics of this perspective.
- ³⁰ Fritz W. Scharpf (2000, 34) characterizes "the dominant but not always explicitly stated perspective" of what he calls "problemoriented policy analysis" as that one of a "benevolent dictator." ("die vorherrschende <aber häufig nicht explizit gemachte> Perspektive des 'wohlmeinenden Diktators'...von der die meisten Analysen der materiellen Policy-Forschung ausgehen").
- ³¹ See the programmatic contributions in R.Mayntz/F.W. Scharpf (1995).
- ³² In a sense by which very often the abstract legal concept of "sovereignty," attributed to the "state," has been mixed up with omnipotence of the state as an (collective) actor.
- ³³ It is a question of context and perspective – but for thousands and millions of men and women for instance in the former Soviet Union, or in Vietnam, Cambodia, or the Sudan, the question so very important to Germans and Jews and their relation to their respective history, whether the Holocaust was "unique," must remain fairly abstract and a positive answer would be even in danger to see their suffering only as relative.
- ³⁴ Even if the general theory of Nöbert Elias (1976) is taken for granted as a general description and understanding of the internalization and monopolization of violence in "modern" societies it does not tell us anything about the degree and amount of violent acts and situations still characteristic for present societies.
- ³⁵ Just to remember two very different examples of this literature from the fifties upon a *present* problem see Anders 1956 and Herz 1959.
- ³⁶ "So-called" – because many of these new "democracies" are "democracies with adjectives" (Collier/Levitsky 1997), "illiberal" (Zakaria 1997) or "defekte Demokratien" (Merkel 1999).

- ³⁷ See the (horror-)scenarios with realistic background information in Bruce Hoffman (1998).
- ³⁸ What ever this term then might exactly mean to him or her...
- ³⁹ Writing this I'm fully aware of Hannah Arendt's critique of Max Weber's definition (!) of politics in a state ("politischer Verband") (Weber 1972, 30 et passim) via the concept of power and the indispensably related concept of violence – but I'm not convinced by the foundations of her critique which presume a categorial gap between politics and power at one hand and violence at the other (Arendt 1970).
- ⁴⁰ "Obwohl Macht und Gewalt ganz verschiedenartige Phänomene sind, treten sie zumeist zusammen auf."
- ⁴¹ "Wir müssen also in der Politik zwischen Zweck und Ziel und Sinn unterscheiden" (Arendt 1993, 126).
- ⁴² "Der Sinn einer Sache im Unterschied zu ihrem Zweck liegt immer in ihr selbst beschlossen, und der Sinn einer Tätigkeit kann nur so lange bestehen, als diese Tätigkeit währt."
- ⁴³ "Die Frage nach den Prinzipien des Handelns bewegt unser Denken über Politik nicht mehr... seit den Jahrzehnten der Amerikanischen Revolution."
- ⁴⁴ "Der Sinn der Politik ist Freiheit" und "Freiheit besteht nur in dem eigentümlichen Zwischen-Raum der Politik." By the way: while Aristotle seems to found his idea of politics in an anthropology of the individual *zoon politicon*, for Hannah Arendt, usually labelled as "neo-aristotelian," an individual can never "be" political, but only act together with others in a way that "politics" arises in an "in-between-space" ("Zwischen-Raum") among them, which she calls "world;" and "at the centre of politics always lies the concern for the world and not for men – i.e. the concern for a world as it is or as it could be different" ("denn im Mittelpunkt der Politik steht immer die Sorge um die Welt und nicht um den Menschen – und zwar die Sorge um eine so oder anders beschaffene Welt") (Arendt 1993, 24 et 25).
- ⁴⁵ I neglect here the different theoretical background of Bauman's quotation.
- ⁴⁶ "Das Private ist politisch" and – in German with a nice rhyme – "Wer sich nicht wehrt der lebt verkehrt."

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