

## EDITORIAL

---

# The role of political theory in contemporary political science

PETR BLÁHA<sup>1</sup> 

Department of Political Science, Faculty of Arts, Jan Evangelista Purkyně University in Ústí nad Labem, Czech Republic

DOI: [https://doi.org/10.24132/cejop\\_2021\\_5](https://doi.org/10.24132/cejop_2021_5)

**How to cite:** Bláha, P. 2021. "The role of political theory in contemporary political science." *Central European Journal of Politics* 7 (2): 1–3. DOI: 10.24132/cejop\_2021\_5

## Editorial

What is the role of political theory within political science? This question comes back like a boomerang and is rethought repeatedly. It is important to note that there is no clear answer. However, in line with Karl Raimund Popper's call for constant critical reflection on the state of society and democracy, it is also appropriate to reflect on the role of political theory. The social sciences from their beginnings in ancient Greece were primarily theoretical, but it was Aristotle in his *Politics* who did the first comparative research on the constitutions of the time. Machiavelli's *The Prince* was also a groundbreaking work in the concept of thinking about politics. All this changed fundamentally with the advent of positivism and the development of empirical investigation.

Political science began to turn to positivist conceptions and in its attempt to imitate the natural sciences de facto rejected political theory. The thinkers centering around the so-called Vienna Circle desired exact scientific knowledge of the world and, by means of a logical analysis of language, wanted to eliminate the forms of statements that were unscientific and thus practically put an end to all philosophical inquiry. Incidentally, Peter Laslett made a rather fundamental accusation against the logical positivists of having destroyed political philosophy and thereby deprived the world of the inquiry into values. His statement was contextually influenced by the times, and from today's perspective, we know that political theory has survived. Paradoxically, it was helped by the Second World War, which came as a shock to the whole of humanity by its cruelty. Political theorists who

---

<sup>1</sup> **Corresponding author:** Petr Bláha, Department of Political Science, Faculty of Arts, Jan Evangelista Purkyně University, Pasteurova 3571/13, 400 96 Ústí nad Labem, Czech Republic. E-mail: [blahapetr01@gmail.com](mailto:blahapetr01@gmail.com)

had to emigrate in the face of Nazi repression did not want to let this event pass without reflection. This led to the influential works of Leo Strauss, Eric Voegelin, and Hannah Arendt, who renewed interest in classical political philosophy and sought to prevent a similar event from happening again.

Today, political philosophy belongs to the standard content of political science and its position is fully respected. And this is precisely due to the expansion of the possibilities and capabilities of researchers. At its core, political science is a science of democracy. But how can we study democracy empirically if we do not define the boundaries of what democracy really is? Political theory does not necessarily yield normative positions. But it is a valuable tool for understanding the social reality that can be empirically investigated. That is why we have also decided to devote an issue of our journal to political science.

It was not our intention to strictly limit the thematic focus to particular topics such as the theory of democracy. We were interested in contemporary perspectives on what political science can take from political philosophy. It turned out that the perspectives on the issue are actually quite diverse. This brought together a group of texts that offered a broad perspective. Both thematically and in terms of the approach to the concept of the text itself. Thus, it is fully demonstrated that the imagination of the author is often a very influential factor affecting the whole form of the text.

However, what was noticeable is the effort to turn attention to inspiring classics. This can be seen in the text of David A. Fusiek, who turns to Hegel in his text, looking for aspects of the classical dialectical relationship between master and slave in the contemporary postcolonial world. He works with the thesis that contemporary governments that we label as authoritarian or populist have failed to break out of the Hegelian dialectic. At the same time, they use this model to maximise their profit, as he shows in the example of contemporary Turkey.

Hynek Tippelt also turns to an important figure in the history of political thought in his text, turning to the political thought of Baruch Benedict Spinoza. Spinoza is traditionally associated primarily with ethics and his geometrical method, but his political work is sometimes unfairly neglected. This study aims to highlight what Spinoza can bring to contemporary conceptions of democracy and what inspirations can be found in his work.

The pair of authors Alina Z. Ananieva and Zinaida I. Rozhkova open the topic of the paradoxes of legitimacy of contemporary democratic systems. They explore the question of strengthening the legitimacy of existing regimes based on contemporary classical authors such as Jürgen Habermas or Bernard Williams. They work with the thesis that for the legitimacy of democratic regimes, the activity of citizens or their ability to assess legitimacy, is important. It is this text that shows what the pathways to this state of affairs are.

Mario Mikhail continues to address the crisis of liberal democracy. This is a very common topic today. But there are very diverse approaches to interpreting or dealing with this situation. Mikhail turns to authors such as Foucault, Adorno, and Agamben. Based on them, he formulates the idea of a specific form of radical democracy that could replace liberal democracy as the most widespread form but at the same time, full of limits. This article attempts to remove the theoretical problems of controlling the lives of citizens. However, the certain controversy, or rather difference from the common trend in the theory of democracy, of this text can be very inspiring and provoke a discussion on the reflection of liberal democracy.

The text by Asad Shukhrat-Zade is entitled *Phantasmagoria*. This philosophical essay is very specific in form and execution, but it reopens a very common theme of the crisis of democracy. However, the underlying perspective is on the question of the atomization of society and the aspect of social movements. The concept that Shukhrat-Zade puts forward is very atypical but very interestingly opens up a topic that has not received wider attention in political theory.

The issue concludes with a review essay by Daniel Štěpánek, who reflects on the current production in feminist political theory. In particular, he reviews the latest production of Judith Butler.

This special issue of the journal thus offers a number of perspectives on the problems facing contemporary political theory. There could certainly be many more topics, as social reality provides many perspectives on the problems of contemporary democracies and offers many potential solutions. It is hoped that reading the studies presented will be inspiring to the reader and lead to further reflection on the problems of the contemporary world.