

The Conceptual History of Politics



THE STUDY OF POLITICS AS A PROJECT AND AS AN INSTITUTION

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POLITICS, THE STUDY OF POLITICS, AND POLITICAL SCIENCE

It is no longer customary to consider Aristotle as the 'first political scientist'. To continue to write a 'history of political science from Aristotle to the present' is to commit at least three cardinal errors. First, the subject matter and the questions central for the research on 'political matters' have changed several times since the ancient polis.¹ Furthermore, the character and the principles of division between the 'disciplines' in teaching and research have also undergone several conceptual breaks since Aristotle, especially in the formation of the modern system of academic disciplines in the 19th century.² Finally, 'politics' is understood as a discipline — similar to ethics or metaphysics — in the title of Aristotle's *Ta politika*, while it is considered as an action in the modern sense of the word; this is a relatively late result of a 'horizon shift' (*Horizontwechsel* in the meaning of phenomenologists) in the conceptual history, in which the study of politics has turned into a study of the 'political' in an action.³

These breaks are irreversible: to return to a neo-Aristotelian 'political science' is a vain and confusing enterprise. However, the awareness of breaks and discontinuities opens problems and challenges for the historian. I suggest that all three 'breaks' mentioned above refer to different histories. Subsequently, we can, in principle, discern three kinds of historiography: histories of 'the study of politics' concerning all studies on 'political' phenomena in any sense of the term; histories of an academic institution teaching and researching 'political matters' — as understood by the practitioners; and finally, histories of the concept of politics.

The problems of quantity and selection tend to make the first type of histories impracticable, while the histories of the second type tend to provinciality when not linked with a wider perspective about the study of politics. In other words, the first view tends to produce fragmentary essays, while the second tends to generate narrow descriptions of external facts mixed with more or less hidden self-legitimations. In this paper I prescribe the histories of the third type, the conceptual histories of politics, as a medium by which both the problem-oriented and the institution-oriented histories can be at least to some extent

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improved, and through which they can also be linked to each other.

The connection of the two types of historiography to the concept of politics would be relatively easy if the concept 'politics' (or 'the political') had a stable meaning. This is obviously not the case. For example, the dominant tendency is to consider the word politics 'confusing' or 'overloaded' to name a few descriptive adjectives.⁴ If proposals to replace this 'dangerous' word by another or attempts to use different words for different aspects of the phenomenon⁵ are excluded, there are at least two strategies for 'restoring the stability' of the word. The essentialist strategy retains the idea of a 'true meaning' of the concept and warns against the 'misuse of the word'. The point of departure of the conventionalist strategy, on the other hand, is that 'normally' people understand each other when using the words 'politics' or 'political'; cases of 'misunderstanding' are considered to be marginal or anomalous.

When applied to the history of the concept of politics, the attempts of the essentialist and the conventionalist to 'restore the order' produce, however, more or less explicitly partisan historiographies: the stability of meaning is the main criteria of 'progress' for the conventionalist, while the essentialist requires a substantial commitment to her/his own viewpoint, which is different for individual essentialists themselves. This partisan commitment not only turns against singular 'misuses' but also tends to systematically underrate the multiplicity and the complexity both in the usage of the 'politics-vocabulary' and in the more sophisticated conceptions of politics.

In that sense the study of the conceptual history itself suggests that the idea of a stable meaning should be given up. The conflicts, shifts and breaks in the meaning of 'politics' and 'the political' can themselves be made the core of the subject matter of the historiography. Thus differences and changes in the meaning would become the main point of reference for the problem- and institution-oriented histories.

Let us start with the idea that 'politics as such' means nothing. Whenever we read or hear the word (or some other variant in the 'politics-vocabulary'), we regard the word 'as such' to have no meaning. A phenomenon can be 'political' only in relation to some conceptual horizons. When something is referred to as being, e.g., 'unpolitical', we have to ask, in which sense: which aspects, dimensions and perspectives of politics are then thematized. Furthermore, we can make two heuristic attempts in order to radicalize the critique against the search for a stable meaning. First, there is no reason to assume that there is a common core to different conceptions. Secondly, no singular conception of politics can thematize all dimensions, aspects and perspectives of the concept; the conceptual conflicts and changes pertain also to the field of thematization.

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THE CONCEPT OF POLITICS AS A THEME

On most occasions it is possible to speak about 'politics' or 'the political' without any real danger of misunderstanding. However, when asked what is meant by these particular words, the participants of the conversation find replying difficult. When an explication of the meaning inherent in the actual usage of the words is required, the participants tend to accentuate different aspects of the meaning or to explicate the idea using many different and often important nuances. The purposes of communication, e.g., the assumption about sharing the meaning, tend to hide often the very real dissensions concerning the words which may easily actualize if the normalcy of the situation breaks down. In this sense, the thematization of a concept can be interpreted exactly as a situation of the breakdown of fluent communication. The tendency to consider a concept as given and shared by all participants tends only to prevent the concept from becoming problem.

There are few, if any, detailed studies both on the ways of using the politics-vocabulary in ordinary language and on the differences in thematization and standpoints in the usage. Gallup polls about the degree of interest in politics which neglect the differences in the understanding of the concepts or the conceptual changes are still conducted. In the absence of detailed case studies I will reconstruct below some general features of the situations in which the concept of politics becomes a theme.

A paradigmatic situation for thematization is the understanding of a text. The need for exegetics arises when the reader must stop reading and ask the meaning of a word. The older hermeneutics was solely interested in those passages of the text to which a meaning could not be attributed without exegetics, which proposed to make the strange familiar, improve the 'readability' of the text and thus make communications possible. In modern textual exegetics we also encounter the converse problem of making the familiar strange, i.e., to dissolve the apparent 'readability' by problematizing interpretation.⁶ The thematization of a concept is not merely an exceptional situation but a permanent condition for a detailed and deeper interpretation of the meanings involved in apparently harmless communication. It is also a condition for the formation of sophisticated personal conceptions of politics.

The transition from mere communication to interpretation, from understanding to re-understanding, introduces a qualitative shift in thematization. These aims are alternatives, but not ones of equal standing, when treating 'confusion' in the texts. The priority of interpretation over communication in the conceptual history is presupposed above in my discussion about the heuristic value of ambiguity in the concept of politics and will be used as a criterion below.

The concept of politics (or the political) may be thematized for different practical purposes. Someone may regard it as a means of policy change and

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improvement, linked to changes in the horizons of what is possible as a 'political act'. Some thematization is already needed in the demarcation between academic disciplines or sub-disciplines such as 'political' economy, history, theology, etc. In other cases the 'political' appears within the special problems of a discipline: which are 'political' associations, who are 'political' criminals and prisoners? Such questions have thematized the concept merely for understanding better the special cases which are met in practice and in which the conventional meanings of the concept have been found to be obviously inappropriate. The confrontation with such a 'special' case may lead to several rounds of proposals for the revision of the concept and its application to the particular case in question. The early work of Hans Morgenthau can be mentioned as an example of personal development from a jurist interested in demarcating 'political questions' in international law to a specialist in the concept of politics.⁷

For the practical purposes it is, in most cases, sufficient to have a criterion to determine whether the phenomena in question 'are' political or not, 'belong to politics' or not. However, when the interest lies in studying 'political phenomena' in general, the criterion itself will be questioned. Questions such as 'what makes politics political' or 'what is the political in politics' may provoke revisions in the preliminary understanding of the concept.

The constitution of the political is also relevant for the subject matter of concrete studies on 'political phenomena'. Is the determination of the political independent of the concrete research or can this research also contribute to the re-determination of the concept? And conversely, can a re-determination of the political lead to a re-thinking of the nature of concrete research?

Obviously, it is possible to thematize the concept only for the purpose of drawing the borders of the 'study of political phenomena'. In this case the thematization of the concept is restricted to the phase prior to the 'normal' research, and the questions about the criterion itself are not confronted. The research tends to focus 'on the phenomena themselves', their political character appearing only as an accidental fact.

If the concept of politics is throughout problematic, the relationship between it and concrete research cannot be one-sided. Already the act of considering some phenomena as 'political' can be interpreted historically, as a claim to re-interpret previous understanding of such phenomena. The conception of politics used in a study is not a phase prior to the research; it contains also heuristic ideas for reunderstanding those phenomena, which have previously not been considered as 'political' ones. The thematization of the concept may thus also guide the research, e.g., by appraising the degree of intensity in the political aspect of the phenomena.

However, the concrete research itself may also re-thematize the concept of politics by using the material studied to challenge the initial interpretation of the

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concept used in the study itself. Here the study of politics is seen as a kind of a 'duel' between the concept and phenomena. The determination of the concept is already an interpretation of the phenomena studied. The 'results' of these studies can then be viewed as a potential contribution to the reinterpretation of the initial conception. Neither the conception nor concrete research can be appraised only by their 'intrinsic merits'. They must be evaluated also by their capacity to challenge each other in this double process of studying politics.

Thus we can discern three degrees of thematizing the concept of politics in the context of research on concrete political phenomena. Let us call them the demarcating, the applying and the duelling views concerning the relationship between conceptual reflection and concrete studies. This division is also related to the art of thematizing the concept of politics itself.

STYLES OF THEMATIZATION

Conceptions of politics emerge when the concept of politics becomes a problem. In relation to this I shall propose a distinction between two different ideal types of conceptions of politics: *definitions* and *constructions*.

To determine the conception of politics is often understood in terms of determining the necessary and sufficient characteristics of the conception; i.e., in terms of those characteristics which 'define' the concept. An ideal definition is an explicit, unambiguous and discriminating as possible; it simplifies the aspects, dimensions and perspectives to a minimum; and it is as thoroughly as possible purged from all contextual references to concrete cases or specific contents. It differs from a naive view but is not necessarily opposed to it; it may very well explicate 'what everyone knows'.

However, it is doubtful whether the ideal form of thematizing a concept like politics would in all cases be the definition of the concept. All 'definitions of politics' tend to reduce the phenomenon to a slogan: the management of common affairs, the art of the possible, the distinction between friend and enemy. These slogans alone thematize only one or two of the aspects, dimensions or perspectives historically related to the concept of politics. When applied to concrete studies, definitions of this kind can hardly be applied; not every usage of the word 'politics' can be replaced by a particular slogan, e.g., by 'the art of the possible'. These slogan-like definitions should rather be conceived as one-sided heuristic thematizations. They cannot effectively be utilized in concrete studies without at least implicitly thematizing other aspects, dimensions or perspectives — which are to be dealt with when speaking about politics.

It is also questionable whether the definitions of politics are as abstract and ahistorical as the ideal purports them to be. Instead, it should be understood that they have their origins in specific historical situations with their own para-

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digmatic references to 'real' activities experienced as 'political' ones. The same holds true for situations in which the definition has been 'applied' more or less modified compared with its origin. In short, all conceptions of politics have their own 'contextual index', an implicit part of the conception which cannot be neglected in the interpretation and use of the conception.

The type of conception of politics, which I refer to as a 'construction', thematizes the conceptual horizon by determining, e.g., which aspects, dimensions and perspectives shall be emphasized and which shall be left in the background. A one-sided horizon is consciously chosen by acknowledging that no conception of politics can be exhaustive. The contrast between definitions and constructions is not absolute, but concerns rather the emphasis in thematization. Contrary to the implicit contextual index of the definition, we can speak of one or a few 'definitional cores' within any larger construction. Without this abstract slogan-like core — or several such cores — constructions would lack a form that gives them their specific heuristic value. Definitions and constructions do not differ so much in their simplicity and complexity respectively. The difference arises from selecting the perspective of thematization.

Let us clarify the discussion with an example. Carl Schmitt's famous friend-enemy-distinction is often read as a definition of politics,⁸ which is against the intentions of Schmitt and neglects the background of discussion in Germany of the late 1920s. But when viewed as a construction, the core of the slogan appears in the thematization of the personal rather than the substantial aspect of the conflict relation. The distinction between friend and enemy (*Unterscheidung zwischen Freund und Feind*) is to be understood in this, and not in the everyday, sense.

Any sophisticated conception of politics contains thus both a definitional and constructive aspect tending, however, to stress one-sidedly either of them. Any general appraisal of these 'conceptual styles' is no more possible than comparing works of art of different styles: definitions could perhaps be compared with 'miniature art', constructions with collages.

The important point in view of my purpose concerns the different rhythms in the formation and change of conceptions. The definitions are products of sudden discovery, of grasping an intuitive idea of formulating a well-known idea in a suggestive way. Thus, they tend to be created at once, demand either acceptance or rejection and, when rejected, they tend to be given up forever. Thus, the definitions are ruled by a rhythm of few dramatic changes, which could be compared with enactments and revisions of constitutions. The thematization of a concept, such as politics, is then limited to those punctual and exceptional situations which dramatize the decisions concerning the concept.

The rhythm of constructions is, on the contrary, dominated by the permanent thematization of the concept. Conceptions of politics are not created once and for all, but in a way where the discontinuous inventions are both completed and

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subverted by shifts of meaning, by continuous, new thematizations and de-thematizations. These changes are not only intended corrections, reformulations or revisions but unintended and often unnoticed erosions and replacements of meanings and thematizations as well. Unlike definitions, borderlines of constructions tend to be diffused, thus being subject to developments and replacements towards several directions simultaneously. The changes of constructions are more contingent and more subversive than the changes of definitions.

A final difference between the two conceptual styles concerns the relation between creation and adherence. Although the finding of a definition is a personal matter, the definitions have a public, or even collective, character which divides men in a relatively distinct manner into proponents and opponents of a definition. Definitions are not only found, they are also propagated; they are not only rejected but also opposed. Contrary to this, constructions tend to remain personal creations similar to works of art. They do not require general 'subscription' or rejection; one may freely use components from other constructions as is the case with collages, while the personal aspect concerns the profile of thematizations and standpoints.

AN OUTLINE OF THE CONCEPTUAL HISTORY OF POLITICS IN THE 20TH CENTURY

My interpretation of the history of the concept of politics uses the distinctions developed above in order to crystallize and re-formulate the 'results' of my research on German conceptions of politics during the Wilhelmine and Weimar periods.⁹ An 'impressionistic' picture of the literature on the concept of politics in the post-war era with short descriptions of some individual contributions will also be sketched.

The 'horizon shift' from 'politics as a discipline' to 'politics as action' originated in Germany at the turn of the 19th century attaining completion towards the end of the century: to speak in terms of 'politics as a discipline' in the 20th century is hopelessly anachronistic. Even the most sophisticated conceptions of politics in the 19th century Germany, like those of Clausewitz or Rochau, thematized only fragmentarily the possibilities opened by the 'horizon shift' to 'politics as action'. The more systematic thematization of 'politics as action' began in Germany only at the turn of the century, but this process of thematization from ca. 1910 to 1933 is nowadays a gold mine — both in quantity and quality — for the historian of the concept of politics.

In terms used in the present essay it is during this period that the decisive transformation from mere communication to interpretation occurred. The awareness of 'politics' as something problematic is related to the experience

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acquired during the war and revolution — i.e., that one cannot dispense with politics — as well as to the extension and revision of the politics-vocabulary (e.g. *Politisierung* (politicization) is a paradigmatic example of the term which the 19th century was unable to express or even to understand).

A break in the manner of discussing the concept of politics (the political) is interesting. The political was an internal problem for several academic disciplines — to those of constitutional and international law, history, philosophy, pedagogics or even theology. Even in this respect the early works of Hans Morgenthau deserve special mentioning: he by-passes the old quarrel concerning the borderline between 'juristic' and 'political' questions in international law by determining the political character of the issue irrespectively of its relation to juristic ones; thus developing a personal conception of politics.¹⁰

The concepts of politics and the political thus became problems beyond encyclopedias or inaugural lectures, being closely linked to concrete research problems. Characteristically, the most well-known contributions to the conceptual discussion, Max Weber's *Politik als Beruf* (1919) and Carl Schmitt's *Der Begriff des Politischen* (1927/1932) are occasional by-products rather than products of the author's long-term studies, although not intelligible without the latter.

When it was clearly felt that the old etatist and instrumental views on politics were insufficient for understanding the political in 'new phenomena' or for discerning the political aspect in those phenomena which previously were not judged as political ones, the interest in thematizing the concept is not surprising. Almost all the approaches to rethinking the concept were more or less conscious attempts to 'restore the order' by silencing the opponents with a suggestive new conception. However, nobody had a chance of succeeding — the conflict between different 'parties of order' continued at least among the jurists even during the first years of the NS-regime.¹¹ Thus the richness and the pluralism in the politics-literature from the late Wilhelmine and Weimar Germany, which is surprising from the contemporary standpoint, are mainly unintended by-products of competing attempts to restore order in the concept formation.

The main instrument for creating order is the definitional core of the conception of politics. In some cases, notably concerning Schmitt's friend—enemy-distinction, a kind of division into adherents and opponents of the idea has taken place in the contemporary debate. On the contrary, the work of Max Weber, and even *Politik als Beruf* alone, contains several definition-like formulations, each of which is later often quoted as 'Weber's definition of politics'. In general, when disregarding the aim of restoring order, the most important conceptions of politics can be interpreted as personal contributions to the conceptual debate in the form of complex constructions and not directly comparable with each other.

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Although the intense thematization of the concept of politics is an unintended by-product, the German politics-literature between 1910 and 1933 is both a paradigmatic example of a break in the art of thematization and a main point of reference for the specialist's discussion on the concept. The post-war rethinking of the concept by authors active in the Weimar period, like Schmitt or Morgenthau,¹² is rather marginal. More important is that this period constitutes 'the formative years' of some other authors, for instance Hannah Arendt and Dolf Sternberger, whose later works on the concept of politics are important. Such French phenomenologists as Sartre, Merleau-Ponty and Aron, whose contributions to the conceptual debate deserve closer attention,¹³ also took German philosophy of this period as their point of reference.

By somewhat exaggerating, we could claim that *sophisticated contributions to the post-war debate on the concept of politics consist of footnotes to Weber, Schmitt and Arendt*. Several implications could be drawn from this interpretation. One of them is the selectivity of the reception: e.g., Helmuth Plessner's *Grenzen der Gemeinschaft* (1924) and *Macht und menschliche Natur* (1931) are hardly remembered.¹⁴ Secondly, there are hardly any conceptions of politics which were appraised as 'turning points' by the contemporaries, comparable to that of *Der Begriff des Politischen* in the last Weimar years.

Thirdly, the works of Hannah Arendt, in particular *The Human Condition* (1958), is claimed to deserve recognition as a truly novel approach to the concept of politics. It has also received growing attention since the seventies. If an increased interest towards the concept of politics even in the Anglo-American world is noticeable, this appears to be a product of intense study of the works of Arendt.¹⁵ In a sense, Arendt's works tend also to open up the implicit possibilities for rethinking the phenomenon of politics present in the philosophies of Heidegger and Jaspers, never developed in detail by themselves.¹⁶

Like *Politik als Beruf* and *Der Begriff des Politischen* also *The Human Condition* is not merely a contribution to the conceptual history of politics, but contains an interpretation of history and culture. Perhaps it is this essayistic character which makes the book fresh and challenging. Compared with it, few other contributions to the conceptual history of politics — in the major European languages — deserve the title of a 'work of art'. They are usually more 'academic' either treating the concept systematically or dealing only with the history of the concept of politics.

Two French contributions from the sixties are good examples. Julien Freund's monumental work, *L'essence du politique* (1965), is historically linked to a Weber- and Schmitt-reception, but the author develops at the same time an original interpretation of the 'presuppositions' of the political. In its style Freund's work is a paradigmatic case of a definition of the political to which the other components of his construction are systematically subordinated.¹⁷ The other French contribution — written originally in English — is Bertrand de

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Jouvenel's *The Pure Theory of Politics* (1963). The core of politics lies at the micro-level of the human action situation, where an actor tries to get another to do something. Comparable to the books of de Jouvenel and Freund is also Hans Buchheim's recent book *Theorie der Politik* (1981). It is a systematic and personal work at a high level of abstraction, thematizing primarily the situational aspect of politics.

Contributing to the conceptual history of politics has been a main preoccupation of some German scholars recently. Especially the works of Ernst Vollrath, *Die Rekonstruktion der politischen Urteilskraft* (1977) and of Dolf Sternberger, *Drei Wurzeln der Politik* (1978) also contain a personal interpretation of the concept, the former being inspired by Kant and Arendt, the latter making a kind of modern restatement of the Aristotelian view. More specific historical studies worth mentioning are Manfred Riedel's *Metaphysik und Metapolitik* (1975) and Christian Meier's *Die Entstehung des Politischen bei den Griechen* (1980). The studies of Pierre Rosanvallon, *Le capitalisme utopique* (1979) and *Le moment Guizot* (1985), thematizing the relations between the political, the social and the economic in the 18th and 19th century France, could perhaps also be compared with them.

The 'politicization' of the German intellectual climate after the student movement of the late sixties has made it nearly as difficult to present naive statements on 'politics' or 'political' as was the case in late Weimar Republic. Despite fruitful ideas — like the feminist slogan 'the personal/the private is political' — no major academic contribution to the concept of politics has yet arisen directly from the experiences of the 'new movements'.

Régis Debray's book, *Critique de la raison politique* (1981) is, however, a product of a self-critique of his own activities. The author's interest has shifted from *la politique* to *le politique* from the politics to be made to the political to be interpreted. Alain Badiou's *Peut-on penser la politique* (1985) can be viewed as a kind of response to Debray — although his book is not explicitly mentioned by Badiou. The author seems to advocate the replacement of the system-bound *le politique* by a reflection of the phenomenon of acting politically, by *la politique*.

The significance of these post-war conceptions of politics is mainly that the conceptual horizon of politics is thematized in manners unknown to the 'classics' in Weimar Germany. However, no 'danger of exhausting' the potential directions of thematization is in sight. The inflatory and imprecise use of slogans like 'new politics' tends rather to prevent the formation of personal conceptions than to favor them, to close the conceptual discussion rather than open a new dimension in it. Although naive statements of politics have partially been overcome, intense efforts to formulate sophisticated conceptions are still an exception.

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THE CONCEPT OF POLITICS IN POLITICAL SCIENCE

It is interesting that there are hardly no 'pure' political scientists among the mentioned authors.¹⁸ Although partially due to the short existence of the institutionalized discipline in most countries, this can hardly hold since the seventies. However, in the histories of political science the conceptions of politics are still discussed only occasionally, and even then only as a sub-theme.¹⁹

This does not mean a complete absence of thematization of the concept among the political scientists. Even the most behaviorist political science textbooks, like Heinz Eulau's *The Behavioral Persuasion in Politics* (1963) contain some reflections on the concept in the introductory chapter. A closer look at some textbooks — whether Anglo-American, French, German or Scandinavian — channels one's interest to the art of discussing the constitutive concept of the discipline and to its relationship with concrete research.

We can in the first instance make a distinction between the 'Introductions to Politics' and 'Introductions to Political Science'. I know only two books which can be classified into the first category, characterized by an interest in understanding the phenomenon rather than in determining the subject matter of a discipline — J.D.B. Miller's *The Nature of Politics* (1962) and Karl Rohe's *Politik. Begriffe und Wirklichkeiten* (1978), especially the latter coming close to the original contributions discussed above.

Let us now construct a stereotype of an 'Introduction to Political Science'. The concept of politics is discussed only in the introductory chapter, mainly for the purposes of demarcation with few references to the heuristic role of the conceptions for concrete studies. References to monographies about the concept of politics are hardly mentioned; and when mentioned, the conception referred to — e.g. Max Weber's — is simplified to be a mere definition.

The textbooks differ from each other concerning the question whether a definition of politics is needed. Definitions tend to be advocated when the textbook commits itself to the principles of a school or some philosophical tradition. A kind of essentialism is more or less immanent in the definitions of this kind, and, therefore, the commitment to a definition is often justly criticized as an instance that puts fruitless *a priori* limitations to research.

As an alternative for binding definitions a list of 'alternative definitions' or a combination of concurrent definitions are occasionally offered. However, sometimes the critique of definitions has led to a conventionalist denial of the thematization of the concept itself. A characterization of this tendency — rather than a view actually advocated — is expressed by Alan Isaac: "*Whatever political scientists say is politics, is politics*".²⁰ This position is understandable in view of attempts to excommunicate 'dissidents' from the discipline, but it has also potential consequences for the relation between concept-formation and research in political science worth closer examination.

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The most interesting aspect of the quotation is its implicit claim of a monopoly of defining the concept. What others than members of the 'craft' say to be politics does not interest professional political scientists. When the problem of determining politics/the political arises within other disciplines or among politicians or literary authors, the professional political scientists close their ranks and tend not to even mention these conceptions — at least not unless they have become 'classics'. But is not, e.g., for the understanding of bureaucracy as a 'political phenomenon', the reading of Kafka a thousand times more fruitful enterprise than all the 'Introductions to Public Administration' put together?

The converse side of this 'closed shop'-tendency among the political scientists is the autonomization of the determination of the subject matter of the discipline from the determination of the constitutive concept of the discipline. This tendency is true also regarding the textbooks giving explicit definitions: they are less interested in understanding and reunderstanding the phenomenon of politics than in demarcating the boundaries within which teaching and research of political science has to be conducted.

This tendency towards autonomization of the discipline from its constitutive concept manifests itself even among such critical members of the profession who thematize the concept, although admittedly, in a particular manner. Adrian Leftwich, e.g., has recently written a book called *Re-defining Politics* (1983) and edited a collection of essays by the title *What is Politics?* (1984). Leftwich, in his book, tends to 'extend' the concept of politics by including some sociological and anthropological problems and linking them to a conventional Eastonian 'definition' of politics — without any reference to the history of the concept or to the continental debate on the subject. The focus of the essay collection — at least the interest for Leftwich himself — is, still more on an extension of the subject matter of the discipline in teaching and research rather than in the formation of personal conceptions of politics.

A look at textbooks, teaching programs, bibliographic classifications and the chronicles on the history of the discipline in different countries²¹ shows that the conceptions of politics have hardly any heuristic value in the practice of political science. The situation is not so different with the monographies: only on specific occasions, e.g., in the critical studies on the history of the socialist movement, such themes as the inability to thematize the political aspect or the shortcomings of a narrow etatistic view on politics are more often taken up.²² The rejection of traditional forms of politics by many post-1968 movements seems to especially challenge academic political scientists to re-interpret their conceptions of politics as a result of profound studies on the conceptions and practice of these movements. But often the original texts of the movement activists are more fruitful than studies of professional politologists who tend either to apply ready-made concepts to new phenomena or to improve the existing concepts by mere ad hoc extensions.

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All these tendencies towards the autonomization of the subject matter from the concept formation in the study of politics can be interpreted as a sign that 'political science' has developed its own ideology. The study of parties, governments, etc. is legitimated by their 'belonging to the subject matter of political science': the question, whether 'their' activity is of political character, is ruled out. The internationalization of the professional ideology offers an excuse for not posing the questions of this type or for not tackling this kind of problems when posed by outsiders of the political science profession.

THE STUDY OF POLITICS BETWEEN PROJECT AND INSTITUTION

After the above discussion, the concept of 'the study of politics' can be given two different interpretations. It can be understood either as a totality of all those studies on political phenomena which both thematize the concept of politics and link — at least in a minimal sense — this thematization to concrete research on political phenomena or it can be understood as 'political science', in the sense of a relatively autonomous academic discipline where the conceptual reflection is necessary only for the purpose of demarcating the subject matter of the discipline. In the following I shall try to make intelligible both the origins of the divergence of political science as a discipline from the study of politics in general and the conflict within the discipline of political science between the trend towards an ideologization of the discipline and the attempt to fight against this tendency by appealing to the study of politics in a wider sense. Expressed in Sartrean terms, I will discuss the divergence and the possibilities of convergence between political science as an institution and the study of politics as a project.

In view of this purpose, a free heuristic use of a 'Sartrean imagination' is resorted to. It draws its inspiration from Sartre's description of the formal structures and 'internal history' of the 'group praxis' as developed in *Critique de la raison dialectique* (1960). The study of politics as a project is interpreted as a projected reunderstanding of politics by reflection and research, while the institutionalization is a result of the internal and unavoidable tendencies within the process of realizing this project.

In order to make the conflict between project and institution intelligible, a brief recapitulation of the *Critique's* main points is called for. For Sartre, the basic conflict lies between activity and passivity, between praxis and inertia. Starting from the level of individual praxis, Sartre develops — through the mediation between the inertic materia and the relations between men in the world of scarcity — a situation of men in a collectivity (*le collectif*) in which they are linked together by external goals and instruments, or by 'serial' structures, and within which their individual actions are ineffective (turning against them-

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selves) at the same time when men are also incapable of common action. Under certain specified conditions, they can, however, liberate themselves from the collectivity by common action, by replacing the collectivity by a 'group' in which they together fight against 'seriality'. The first phase — in the sense of the internal logic — of the group praxis is the 'group-in-fusion' of free and equal individuals. Any attempt to preserve the group leads to the 'oath group' in which freedom is limited by the equality confirmed by the oath. A new inertia begins to develop from the measures against the 'traitors' of the group; the next stage is the development of an 'organization' where equality is limited by the division of labor and hierarchy. These structures become permanent in the 'institution' within which the group has 'established itself' by internalizing the inertia developed within the group.

An institution in Sartre's sense is still a group, but it does not support the formation of groups from the collectivity; instead it tends to prevent the rise of new, spontaneous groups. The existence of group praxis is threatened from within in two ways: by a sudden dissolution and by a slow involution through institutionalization. "Le moment institutionnel, dans le groupe, correspond à ce qu'on peut appeler l'autodomestication systématique de l'homme par l'homme".²³

To adapt this conceptual apparatus for the interpretation of the study of politics requires simplifications. Let us imagine a collectivity of spectators looking at 'politics' like at a spectacle: they understand that they themselves are dependent on it but have no idea of the meaning of the activity called 'politics'. The study of politics arises in this situation as a thematization of the phenomenon, as a project in the sense of an enterprise to make politics intelligible through reflection and research. Compared with the project of 'acting politically', the project of studying politics is a more modest enterprise, but its structure does not differ from the former case.

Opposing the conventionalist spectator view, the project of studying politics is tempted by essentialism in searching for the final politics (comparable with the temptation to understand the group itself as an organism). This version of the project is, however, doomed to failure from the beginning: it is a manifestation of dilettantism which has to be overcome, if the project is to be continued.

The break with the spectator view towards a deeper understanding of politics by reflection and research is a long-term project in which 'works of art' of high quality are not easily obtained. When the long-term character of the project is realized, a conflict appears between the study of 'here and now' and the creation of opportunities for 'better' studies later. The first alternative is liable to dilettantism for the lack of external support; the second is liable to transferring the studying activity *ad infinitum* in obtaining new 'resources'. In this conflict the origin of the opposition between project and institution is present *in nuce*.

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The question is, however, not only of timing. It is also connected to the processes of institutionalization. The students of politics are obliged to appeal to the establishment — to, e.g., politicians, capitalists, bureaucrats — to secure the required resources for the study. This can be achieved when they gain acceptance for the discipline as an academic institution. When the project of studying politics is institutionalized, its proponents tend to regard themselves as belonging to the establishment. It is difficult for them to affirm the initial break of the project with the spectator view. There is a rather acute danger of re-internalizing the spectator view by research not posing conceptual questions and not trying to reinterpret the concrete phenomena studied from the viewpoint of a conceptual break. Therefore, an institutionalization signifies actually a legitimation of a new type of expertise with a tendency of monopolizing the right to speak 'scientifically' about politics.

The opposition between project and institution remains present during the whole process of institutionalization. It can manifest itself in various ways: in the realization of the institutionalization itself, in its forms, in the retaining or reaffirming of the project within the institution, etc. The history of political science could largely be rewritten in terms of this opposition — as a history of institutionalizing and institutionalized phases of the project of studying politics.

Characteristic for the existing historiography of political science — at least when written by the professionals of the discipline themselves — is a pro-institutional bias. When the mere achievement of an acknowledged status for an academic discipline is considered as a criterion of reaching the institutional stage in the project, it is, without doubt, difficult to resist the institutional bias: who really prefers leaving the study of politics to amateurs and dilettanti alone, even at the cost of being subject to 'academization' and specialization? In any case, the arguments against institutionalization deserve attention, at least when they are not direct legitimations of claims for resources for old or concurrent new disciplines.

The form of institutionalization also poses crucial questions. What are the 'costs' of teaching and research if the institutionalization is obtained by support of certain fractions of the establishment or established academic interests? Have there been other realizable forms of institutionalization? Or have the proponents of institutionalization among the project of studying politics used institutionalization as a means in favoring their own type of research and disfavoring some other types?

After the 'achievement' of the institutional status, the conflict between project and institution remains acute, even within an individual. When not totally involved in mere 'managerial' activities, established professionals may also experience the conflict in their own research or lectures. If they have internalized the ideology of the discipline, the results of their rethinking may not be so

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different from their previous views yet are worth noting by the historians of the discipline.

By appealing to the project, to the original break with the spectator view on politics, it is always possible to question the established studies and institutional forms. In the absence of any 'final' definitions of politics, the critics can never 'prove' their argument that the institutionalized political science 'does not study politics any more'; but even to state such an argument may bring about interesting disturbances in the institution. This is the case especially when the critique is combined with detailed conceptual reflections or studies on the divergence between the project and the institutionalized studies — before the critique itself is suppressed.

Within the project of studying politics a division between conceptual studies and concrete research may also become actualized in the institutional phase. A mere thematization of conceptual problems may be relatively harmless for an institutionalized discipline: critics of this type may be neutralized by acknowledging them as a specialists in a 'new sub-field' relaying 'esoteric' studies to other specialists. They may be asked to write an encyclopedia article of 'politics' but not to hold introductory courses or to write textbooks. This institutionally marginal position may be countered with that specific superiority which ensues from a greater distance to the naive spectator view compared with that of the established professionals. The conceptual specialists can well understand and study the conceptions on politics implicit in the teaching and research of the established professionals, while the latter are hardly able to do the same to themselves, not being acquainted with the deeper interpretational problems in the conceptual horizon of politics.

By attributing the status of conceptual specialist to certain proponents of the project of studying politics, the established professionals protect 'ordinary research' from their interventions: the barrier between project and institution is also erected between reflection and research. In accepting such a division of labor the conceptual specialist also accepts the status of not being able to use heuristically her/his own concrete research to rethink her/his own conceptions. To accept institutionalization tends to lead to giving up the enriching feed-back between reflection and research.

There are, of course, 'good reasons' by which the conceptual specialist can legitimate her/his role in the project of studying politics. The main reason is the time-consuming character of the activity itself which presupposes above all much reading. If the specialist does not accept her/his role, she/he is also bound to become involved in conflicts with the establishment, which then in turn 'steals' more of her/his time.

The conceptual specialist is not, however, protected against the inert routines of the study itself. The higher the quality of her/his studies, the more obvious is her/his tendency to develop an attitude of an established profession-

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al in her/his sub-field: she/he tends to denounce dilettantism, to suppress fresh ideas and approaches in their initial stages; she/he also tends to reduce new actions, experiences and neologisms to old ones by appealing to her/his own competence; she/he tends to view suspiciously 'mere researchers' who sometimes dare to make excursions into conceptual problems in order to improve their research. She/he may also restrict the sub-project of conceptual studies, e.g., by limiting her/his own studies to be 'merely historical' without trying to construct personal conceptions of politics.

However, the important point between project and institution is the open character of the opposition in the 'group praxis' of studying politics at every 'stage' of its development. Decisions concerning the opposition are made continuously in life and in studies involved in the project. The process of institutionalization manifests itself not only in decisions but also in the process of their involution. The attainment of the institutional stage is both a new form of reaffirmation of the project breaking with the naive spectator view and an affirmation of a tendency that the break cannot be upheld in its original radical form. Similarly, the 'misuse' of institutions is both an affirmation of the project against the self-domesticating tendency inherent in the institutions and a capitulation to the institutional status of the project itself.²⁴

HOW TO STUDY POLITICS AS A PROJECT TODAY?

It has often been said that the last thing in understanding people is to become an academic psychologist. Analogously, one sometimes tends to think that the last thing to do in order to understand politics is to become a professional political scientist. In a situation in which political science has become a 'respectable' academic institution nearly everywhere, this conclusion is no mere academic question.

If there already exists a discipline institutionally reserved for studying politics, the representatives of other disciplines do not easily dare interfere in 'politics'. In the similar vein, politicians, journalists, literati or other laymen more readily acknowledge the politologist's expert position in politics. The danger that a profession obtains a monopoly in defining what is 'politics' becomes more actual.

However, the institutionalization of a discipline forms an ambivalent situation, too. When the discipline needs no self-legitimation anymore, the need of criticism arises concerning the quality of the earlier studies. On the other hand, when the institutional status of the discipline is no more questioned from the outside, the *Spielraum* of criticism for the professional politologists themselves tends to grow.

It is impossible to say in general which of these tendencies is stronger in a

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concrete situation. If one intends to study politics as a project even within the institutionalized political science, one can make use of them both. There are some rules of thumb, linked to the above discussion, concerning both tendencies which can be mentioned. In order to avoid the development of political science into a 'closed corps' with a monopoly on 'political expertise' one can, e.g., avoid participation in professional rituals and ceremonies, learn from people thematizing the conceptual problems in other academic disciplines or from politicians, journalists, etc., and try to use them as allies against the narrow specialist mainstream political scientists. One could also try to obtain a professional's (factual) competence in some other academic discipline as well, thus not being totally at the mercy of one's colleagues.

On the other hand, one can do much subversive work in one's own research within the discipline. One may choose themes 'neglected' by the mainstream; e.g., conceptual studies or studies of the history of political science. By doing so, further distance to the practice of the mainstream colleagues can be obtained, the legitimacy of their work questioned and the intrigues by which they have managed to obtain a respectable position can be revealed. Thus, the remaining illusions about the appeals of the 'best arguments', for instance, are lost.

To make use of such rules of thumb is a manifestation of the statement that 'the personal is political' — even in the politics of political science. No guarantee of success can be given. In the terms of graffiti from West Berlin squatters: *Du hast keine Chancen, aber nutze sie aus!*

NOTES

1. The idea that history should be written as a history of questions rather than as answers to stable questions is advocated, e.g., by Collingwood (1946) and Skinner (1969; 1978).
2. There are few comprehensive studies on the history of the changes in the character and internal relations of academic disciplines. For a good case study concerning Germany, cf. Stichweh (1984).
3. This is a main thesis in Palonen (1985b).
4. Cf., e.g., Sternberger (1986, 89); Heidenheimer (1986, 18—19); for politics as a 'dangerous word', cf. Jellinek (1929, 95).
5. Cf. the division of the German word *Politik* into three English words: politics, policy and polity in Rohe (1978, 60—63) and the radicalization of this idea in Heidenheimer (1986); for my criticism of the latter, cf. Palonen (1986).
6. On the history of hermeneutics in this respect, cf. esp. Szondi (1975).
7. This can be seen by looking at the development of Morgenthau from (1929) through (1933) to (1946).
8. On the contemporary Schmitt-reception, cf. Palonen (1985b, 141—142).

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9. The discussion concerning the period until 1933 is based on Palonen (1985b).
10. In his work from 1929, Morgenthau apparently only borrows Heinrich Triepel's (1927) etatist-teleological conception of politics, in (1933) he has 'liberated' himself both from the etatist and teleological conceptions of politics.
11. On the relationships between different pro NS-scholars in German jurisprudence until 1936, cf. Meinck (1978).
12. Cf. esp. Schmitt (1950) and Morgenthau (1946).
13. On the use of a Sartrean inspiration for a conception of politics, cf. Palonen (1983) and (1984).
14. For comments on Plessner, cf. Seitter (1985) and Palonen (1985b).
15. For the literature on Arendt, cf. the monographs of Canovan (1974); Parikh (1981); Enégren (1984); Kateb (1984).
16. Cf. in this respect esp. Arendt (1978).
17. For an autobiographical account on the original context of Freund's conception of politics, cf. Freund (1981).
18. On the irrelevance of *Deutsche Hochschule für Politik* for the conception of politics in Weimar Germany, cf. Palonen (1985a).
19. Cf., e.g., Kastendiek (1977, 191–204) and Ricci (1984, 212–220).
20. Quoted in Isaac (1969, 14).
21. Cf., e.g., Andrews, ed. (1982). See esp. the article by Khan on Pakistani political science, where the well-known Western booklists and sub-divisions of the discipline reappear in a Third World context.
22. On the pre-1918 German socialist movement, cf. the important studies of Schorschke (1955); Croh (1974); Stephan (1977) and Walter (1981). Still more directly the concept of politics is thematized in the Lenin-monography of Polan (1984).
23. Sartre (1960, 585).
24. On an interpretation concerning the relation between decision and involuntariness in Sartre's *Critique*, cf. Palonen (1984).

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