
THE NATURE AND STATUS OF THE POLITICAL: DISCOURSES ON THE POLITICAL AND POLITICAL DISCOURSES

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The examination of perspectives on the nature and status of the political in human coexistence at first sight may seem a textbook requirement, perhaps determined by the need for a retrospective summarization.

How that nature has been conceived or how the status of the political has been conceptualized, how the diverse conceptualizations have intermingled over time, transformed, 'distanced' from one another, or has the radical change in comprehension of the nature of the political influenced the conceptualization of the status of the political?

But within the context of dominating intellectual climate, current tendencies and processes, which, while being universal (globalization, decrease in sovereignty of nation-states, marketization of politics, prioritization of energetic safety), are also local (a persisting certain level of socio-cultural ambiguities in post-Soviet societies, reorganization of former political entities), such a need may not be deemed just a textbook one.

Perhaps it is more of an intrinsic quest to understand why is it so and where are we heading to, irrespective of whether we possess a right to raise such questions or not. As for the academic discourse, it may give a chance to shed light on these issues, as far as it is interwoven with the above mentioned processes.

The philosophical deliberations on the nature and status of the political are organically interrelated with the issue of possibility of human coexistence. It is the problem of the possibility of human coexistence, which over centuries has maintained the issues of the nature of the political, and, as it will consequently become clear - its status, within the focus of the academic discourse. For our purposes, an overview of the academic discourse in particular may also be helpful in terms of advancing towards clarification of the above mentioned issues.

The Scientific – Philosophical Intellectual Horizon and the Issue of the Possibility of Human Coexistence

Questioning the possibility of human coexistence assumes an intellectual orientation specific to certain scientific-philosophical horizon. Its roots may be traced back to ancient worldview. For ages, it has determined the ways in which the above mentioned issue should be contemplated over. As far as the scientific-philosophical intellectual horizon is concerned, positions, questions and solutions get interconnected within it in an interesting way, which seem to fit the 'permissible' boundaries of the mentioned outlook. But as time shows, they can intentionally or unintentionally

ally “cross and challenge those boundaries” and pose a need for fundamental reconstruction of the entire intellectual horizon.¹ Distinguishing such a groundbreaking time-period with regard to existing intellectual horizon on the issue of possibility of human coexistence is important towards ordering of the research thought. But there is one circumstance, specific both for the issue raised and the intellectual horizon it outlines. The shift of these groundbreaking epochs begins from 17th century and encompasses the second half of the 20th century. Transformations of that intellectual horizon present themselves not really in terms of sequential shifts of radically different paradigms (for instance, like in T. Kuhn’s vision of development of science or M. Foucault’s vision of emergence of epistemes in humanities), nor are those consistent with the logic of the Hegelian model of development, which assumes synthesis of elements from previous stages at a certain stage of development, rather (if A. Toffler’s metaphor of the “wave” be partially applied) they seem a whirlpool of accumulated “intellectual waves”. These “intellectual waves” become commencement points not only for new combinations, but also for ‘unexpected’ ramifications. Hence, no intellectual tradition of conceptualization of human co-existence dissolves completely.

There are no fixed boundaries for the intellectual horizon either. It resembles a network, the flexible nodes of which are the roots of newer nodes, but which can get distanced through extension and get connected with the extension of entirely another node. For the statement not to sound too abstract, a quick overview of diverse contemporary scientific- philosophical directions such as egalitarian liberalism, liberal feminism, several post-Marxist trends, communitarianism, etc., would be sufficient. One can discern in them the deep influence of social – political and ethical thought not only of the recent four centuries but the ancient thought as well.

But, referring back to the issue of possibility of human co-existence, it should be stated in addition, that it not only has acquired but continues to maintain the special (in terms of its significance and implications) status ever within scientific-philosophical intellectual horizon. Yet, this is not say that there have been no changes in the perspectives of considering the issue or in accents of inquires. The latter, as it has been already mentioned, are consequences of transformations within the very intellectual horizon. In particular, the process of “self-determination” of social sciences, which commenced in the second half of the 19th century, had notably influenced the scientific - philosophical intellectual horizon, as well as, the process of considering the issue of possibility of human co-existence. Those had contributed to “finding” of new, previously not discussed aspects and perspectives, which, for some reasons, may present themselves only steadily.

Discussion of globalization, diverse ethnic, religious, ecological and gender movements in terms of contemporary trends, is an inseparable part of currently dominating intellectual horizon. On the one hand, within that intellectual horizon those are deemed as 'actualization of the potential' of human coexistence, hence, an opportunity for new social forms and developments. On the other hand, those present themselves as indications of fragility of human coexistence and its sensitiveness towards diverse processes. Under such equivocality, the revision and reconcep-

¹ Such an attempt has been first made by 17th century English philosopher Thomas Hobbes.

tualization of issues related to human coexistence, or formulation of new inquires within the given intellectual horizon, sometimes even constituting the given intellectual horizon, projects itself as a periodically indicated necessity. One thing is obvious: until now the scientific – philosophical thought doesn't cease to claim or commit reflecting on the latter. The discourse (s) evolving around the nature and status of the political has its important place within those reflections.

The Political and Politics. New Distinctions within Scientific – Philosophical Horizon

Generally, there are number of reasons for the special interest towards discourses on the political and political discourses. Traditionally, since ancient times, a special importance has been attributed to considerations of the political and politics with reference to both human coexistence and the functioning of an individual in it. As it has been specified earlier and emphasized on diverse occasions, the ancient intellectual horizon assumed an equation of society and the polis. The goal of public-political organization, in a larger sense, was the common good, which, in its turn, had an influence over the accomplishment of the chief good – happiness.² Recall, according to Aristotle's definition the human being was a political animal. In ancient vision, organization of the highest form of human coexistence – society, is strictly political and not a derivative of all other forms and goals of those. At the same time, within this ancient perception of the world, the political is the very platform, where being engaged in politics is an indication of a special status, and opportunities. In this regard, J. Habermas, reconstructing the 'oikos-agera' relationship of the ancient world through the prism of liberal differentiation of the 'private-public' spheres, notes: "...Status in the polis... was based upon status as the unlimited master of an oikos. The reproduction of life, the labor of the slaves, and the service of the women went on under the aegis of the master's domination; birth and death took place in its shadow... Only in the light of the public sphere did that which existed become revealed, did everything become visible to all. In the discussion among citizens issues were made topical and took on shape. In the competition among equals the best excelled and gained their essence-the immortality of fame. Just as the wants of life and the procurement of its necessities were shamefully hidden inside the oikos, so the polis provided an open field for honourable distinction: citizens indeed interacted as equals with equals ..., but each did his best to excel..."³ Feministic and capabilities approach readings of this quotation would immediately observe traces of exclusion in political terms within the given model of organization of human coexistence. Here, within the political platform, the subordination and exclusion of women and children, as well as non-citizens, is at service of a certain form of political organization of human coexistence.⁴ But, leaving aside these pos-

² See **Аристотель**. Политика, Собрание сочинений в 4 томах, т. 4, р. 376, Никомахова Этика, Собрание сочинений в 4 томах, т. 4, р. 55-57.

³ **J. Habermas**, *The Structural Transformations of Public Sphere*, Cambridge, 1989, pp. 3-4.

⁴ See **Carol Pateman**, *The Fraternal Contract*, In: *Political Philosophy. An Anthology*, ed. by Robert E. Goodin and Philip Pettit, Malden, 2010, p. 73-84, Martha S. Nussbaum, *Frontiers of Justice. Disability, nationality, species membership*, Cambridge, 2006.

sible interpretations, it is necessary to stipulate the very nature and special status attributed to the political. In human co-existence the political assumes a competition, a game, where the human being is given a chance for self-expression and self-improvement⁵. It is in a sense an end in itself, even if the chief goal is declared to be the common good. Hence, the ancient worldview has 'made' to look back and inquire of the nature of the political. And if the question be reformulated in a constructivist tradition, which seems to be the dominating contemporary scientific-philosophical intellectual disposition, it'll turn into: what nature and status is attributed to the political by discourse?

But, in the event of series of changes in the scientific-philosophical intellectual horizon, the political and politics, while having not lost their special status, from being an end and important in itself, transform into a direct 'transmitter', mediator, platform, where all problems, issues, positions may be expressed and demonstrated in principle. In other words, those acquire more of an instrumental nature and are meant for changing the social reality "...There was in modernity the generalized conviction that...politics had the means to carry out a *radical transformation* of the social, whether such a transformation was conceived as a founding revolutionary act, as an orderly set of bureaucratic measures proceeding from an enlightened elite, or as a single act opening the way to the operation of those mechanisms whose automatic unfolding would be sufficient to produce a 'society effect'"⁶. It is within this universality of the political that its uniqueness and significance manifest. At the same time its matter is mostly revealed as striving to share power or striving to influence the distribution of power, either among states or among groups within a state⁷, while power as a central phenomenon in revealing of the political is an ability to bring about future states of the world.⁸

But the issue of the nature of the political - within the "end in itself - instrumental" spectrum, is not at all sufficiently addressed through the dispute around it. The above mentioned steadily gets us closer to highlighting of an important link. It seems that the status of the political within the context of human coexistence is inviolable, even if in scientific-philosophical horizon the discourse has 'dared' to change its position towards the political in the event or during the process of whatever transformations. Nevertheless, it is not completely the case. And, in order to indicate that essential intellectual shifts in scientific-philosophical horizon on the nature of the political unavoidably impact the positions on its status, it is necessary to refer to a fundamental, at the same time, a very interesting distinction. Elaboration on it may be encountered in one of the most influential post-Marxist doctrines, which calls itself radical democracy. One of its representatives - Chantal Mouffe, in one of her core works writes: "By 'the political', I refer to the dimension of antagonism that is inherent in human relations, antagonism that can take many forms and

⁵ Such an interpretation could be encountered in **Hannah Arendt**, *Was ist Politik?* Fragmente aus dem Nachlaß, München-Zürich, 1993, pp. 38-39.

⁶ **Ernesto Laclau**, *Power and Representation*, In: *Emancipation(s)*, London, 1996, p. 84.

⁷ See **Max Weber**, *Politics as a Vocation*, <http://anthropos-lab.net/wp/wp-content/uploads/2011/12/Weber-Politics-as-a-Vocation.pdf>

⁸ See **Frank Lovett**, *Power*, In: *A Companion to Contemporary Political Philosophy*, 2nd Edition, vol. II, 2007, p. 711.

emerge in different types of social relations. 'Politics', on the other side, indicates the ensemble of practices, discourses and institutions which seek to establish a certain order and organize human coexistence in conditions that are always potentially conflictual because they are affected by the dimension of 'the political'".⁹

It is obvious, that in larger sense, here exposed are two radically different aspects of the political - antagonistic, which at first glance continuously endangers human coexistence and the other, on the contrary, is the opportunity to put it into order, to organize. This paradox not only confirms the significance of the political and the politics, but also once again raises the issue of the nature of the political and the status, which is conditioned by that nature. When, regarding purely theoretical dispute or description of another practical situation within social philosophy and neighbouring areas, the question on which sphere is primary or determining the rest of all spheres in human coexistence is being raised, discussions are in principal evolving around the relationship of the political and the economic.

Two pivotal representatives of the above mentioned post-Marxist doctrine of radical democracy - Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe have frequently attempted to justify the primacy of the political in their diverse articles, essays and core works.¹⁰ At least, the way in which the above mentioned two authors conceptualize the "political" and the "politics" exposes that the discourse on the political in their doctrine is indeed a matter of principle and directly refers to distortion, even to the problem of the dissolution and the death of the political.¹¹ In specification of their conceptual system the definition of that term is principal inasmuch as it will determine what the human coexistence as a social objectivity looks like, how human coexistence is possible and what are the perspectives for it, if the nature of the political is on the edge of dissolution. Therefore, the political discourse in Mouffe's and E.Laclau's doctrine of radical democracy and on human coexistence is conjunct with the discourse on the political. Political discourse on the social reality exists as long as there exists the political. Moreover, in aspirations to raise the issue of the nature of the political, they crave to give rebirth to political discourse on human coexistence through the discourse on the political. If the political is dead or is on the edge of destruction, then the political discourse around the human coexistence will also eventually perish. Accentuation of the political and attaching importance to it is nothing else than a goal to keep alive and rehabilitate the political discourse on the social reality. Otherwise, the same authors observe a direct threat in the doctrines of egalitarian liberals, aggregative democracy and communitarians. Ch. Mouffe believes, their political discourse on the social reality is heading more towards distortion of the political, while the distortion of the political, reduced from their general ideas, entails essential threats for the social reality and politics.¹² In their attempts to

⁹ **Chantal Mouffe**, *The Democratic paradox*, New York, 2000, p. 101.

¹⁰ See **Laclau Ernesto, Mouffe Chantal**, *Hegemony and The Socialist Strategy*, London and New York, 2001, p. XIV, Laclau Ernesto, *Power and Representation*, In: *Emancipation(s)*, New York, 1996, p. 103.

¹¹ See «Hegemony and Socialism: An Interview with Chantal Mouffe and Ernesto Laclau by Ian Angus», <http://english.illinoisstate.edu/strickland/495/laclau2.html>.

¹² See **Mouffe Chantal**, *On the Political*, London and New York, 2005, p. 10-12, Mouffe Chantal, *The Return of Political*, London- New York, 1993, p. 32-43.

break off with the economy-centred intellectual orientation of Marxism the initiative of these two authors, having in perspective their definitions, can be called nothing else than 'inauguration' of the political. And the purpose of that inauguration is not only the desire not to underestimate the role and significance of the political, but also to point to all those threats¹³, which arise when the political is strictly instrumentalised or, which is more unacceptable, is being defined in economic terms.¹⁴ Hence, within "instrumental – end in itself" extreme solutions, contemporary political discourse gives birth to two "philosophical troubles" at once. The first one is the step undertaken by some thinkers in discourse, regarding the way in which the nature of the political be understood. And in this dispute, ranging from instrumentality of the political to the loss of its peculiarities and its comprehension in economic or ethical terms, suddenly it becomes obvious, that the contemporary political discourse signals about the second – the death of the political or its possible distortion or extinguishing.¹⁵ Subsequently, it becomes evident, that the 'discourse on the political' is foremost decisive, which can at once clarify whether there is, in essence, a political discourse on social reality and human coexistence. And whether the contemporary problems of post-Soviet, as well as non post-Soviet societies be sought for here?

Discourse or Opportunities for Transformation of Social Reality

There is another important question which needs clarification – the use of discourse in plural. It seems common today that discourse be considered in singular terms and as a more or less organized reality, where multiple perspectives gain their right to be heard or based on whatever circumstances, are deprived of it. M. Foucault, one of the most influential thinkers on the issue of discourse, writes: "...In every society the production of discourse is at once controlled, selected, organized and redistributed by a certain number of procedures whose role is to ward off its powers and dangers, to gain mastery over its chance events, to evade its ponderous, formidable materiality"¹⁶. Discourse sets boundaries and designates the agenda. But Foucault is also the theoretician, who, based on historical material, encourages choosing in favor of submitted or subdued, or, more precisely – the subjugated discourses.¹⁷ Thus he confirms the existence of power relations even within potential

¹³ In particular, they have warned repeatedly, that elimination of ideological boundaries entails decrease in political struggle and evolving of extremistic and ethnic, religious intolerance in negative sense.

¹⁴ The aggregative model of democracy is referred to. In a sense, it is a little different from the collectivistic nature specific to democracy, for it emphasizes the importance of every individual preference and voting performed on that basis, whereas democratic election mainly assumes a totality comprised of the votes of individuals. See also **Jon Elster**, *The Market and The Forum: Three Varieties of Political Theory*, In: *Political Philosophy. An Anthology*, ed. by Robert E. Goodin and Philip Pettit, Malden, 2010, p. 155:

¹⁵ Almost identical position could be encountered also at **Жан Бодрийар**, *В тени молчаливого большинства*, // "Призрак Толпы", М., 2008, p. 195-197:

¹⁶ **Foucault Michel**, *The order of discourse*, In: *Untying the text: A Poststructuralist Reader*/ ed. and transl. By Rober Young, London, Boston, 1981, p. 52.

¹⁷ See **Foucault Michel**, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977*, New York, p. 81-83.

discourses. In this case, political discourses - the reason for use of plural, is an attempt to highlight the potential diversity and limitations of political discourses on human coexistence in principal, which are inescapable, once a repertoire of issues, problems and themes has been outlined. Obviously, the acceptance of one's limitation and the condition for using discourse in plural are the only way out, which doesn't refer only to issues, problems and inquires, but also to ways in which those are contemplated over.

Contemporary discourses on the political, which are concerned with the problems of human coexistence, and contemporary political discourses articulate in particular the themes of identity, democracy, liberalism, socialism and it seems, thus they specify the agenda of our times. This could be certainly regarded as the demand of time (the above mentioned collapse of USSR, the loss of prestige of the views of the left and attempts of reconceptualization, restoration of influence of those, the world economic crises of 2008, the occasional economic and political processes evolving around European Union). One thing is obvious: it is within these boundaries that the political discourse on human coexistence seems currently possible and, at the same time, the discourse on the political and politics is possible at all. Of course, it is also somewhat clear, that the above mentioned subject already denotes a direction of thought – consideration of the problematic character of human coexistence from the prism of the political and politics, and even identifies preliminary boundaries of the tradition.

Within the context of academic orientations of the beginning of the 21st and the end of the 20th centuries the term “discourse” is among the so called “trendy”. One can hardly find a sphere in social-humanitarian studies, where the “discourse”, upon the “call of the trend” or perhaps not only for this reason, wouldn't be put into circulation in terms of a fundamental concept, which testifies the victory of constructivism¹⁸ in social-humanitarian sciences. Contemporary social sciences and disciplines in particular seem to enthusiastically accept the legitimacy of its existence and applicability (political science, cultural studies, sociology, for instance.) Of course, this concept is not univalently perceived in the academic environment. It could be observed, that over the course of time, depending on the scientific-philosophical goals of the particular thinker or author (for instance, there are certain differences in M.Foucault's and E. Laclau's perceptions) the content of the core concept of “discourse” has been altered. In this regard, perhaps it is to the point to quote one of the most widespread contemporary definitions. “Discourse is the primary terrain of the constitution of objectivity as such. By discourse... I do not mean something that is essentially restricted to the areas of speech and writing, but any complex of elements in which *relations* play constitutive role”¹⁹. This definition of discourse, which is one of the in-depth reconceptualizations subsequent to Foucaultian perception of discourse, for known reasons (particularly the author's – E.Laclau's aspiration to reform the Marxist tradition in post-structuralist perspec-

¹⁸ Constructivism is an influential doctrine of philosophy of science developed in the 70's-80's of the 20th century, according to which, cognition is the active construction vs. reflection of the subject's interpretations or models of reality, where the reality is what has been constructed.

¹⁹ **Laclau Ernesto**, *On populist reason*, London and New York, 2007, p. 68.

tive) entails several traditions of philosophizing – from Marxism to structuralism and post-structuralism. In other words, discourse is not a linguistic reality separate from social reality; rather it is the inalienability of the linguistic and non-linguistic. “...Every object is constituted as an object of discourse, insofar as no object is given outside every discursive condition of emergence”²⁰. Meanwhile, E. Laclau asserts, it is not to say that there does not exist a world beyond human thought and independent of human will. Rather, the objects are constituted with peculiarities under certain discursive conditions and acquire certain meaning exclusively within that platform.²¹ In essence, the definition by E. Laclau attempts to deepen the impact of a philosophical event of the 20th century called “linguistic turn” and to make it more significant within contemporary possible perceptions of the political and the social. E. Laclau makes one more step towards extending the boundaries of the above mentioned Foucaultian tradition, assumingly, to actualize the unrealized potential of the latter.

In case of a daring attempt to interpret E. Laclau’s move, perhaps it could be understood as an explicit claim to enhance the performative capacity of the discourse and, under the theoretical influence of Marxism, (need not be forgotten, that K. Marx and Marxists strived not only to know the world, but also to change it), confirm the persisting bond between writing, speaking and acting. Hence, it is nothing else than a craving and a goal to justify or, may be, to more precisely postulate the transformative-practical influence of any discourse. Departing from such standpoint, it could be stated, that the discourses on the political and the political discourses, nevertheless, cannot avoid an inseparable connection between them. And it is not at all about the duplication of components within the two. If attempts are however made to demarcate those, then, at first approach it could be indicated, that “political discourses” seem to refer to everyday life or that, which is commonly accepted to term being (German – *dasein*), where those evolve interconnected with ‘the now and here’. “Discourses on the political”, which do not postulate extrahistoricity, nevertheless, refer first and foremost to the distance from the ‘direct political now and here’, as well as the orientation of examining the political in its entirety and generality. But one thing is obvious: at some point there appears an opportunity for them to exchange and intermingle, as far as the political discourses continuously refer to politics, for example, to a theoretical—academic discourse. Whereas the discourses on the political tend to grow into political discourses. And, within this transitions and transformation they construct, transform, manifest new dimensions, perspectives and correlations of democracy, liberalism and socialism, which are directly related to human coexistence.

Although some of those claim to be strongly reliable or have universal meaning, the outstanding peculiarity of discourses, nevertheless, remains to be their contextual indwelling. Being frameworked, hence also being restricted by certain socio-cultural conditions, they not only forward their agenda and inherently justify the nature of the political and its components in favour of this or that viewpoint or

²⁰ **Laclau Ernesto, Mouffe Chantal**, *Hegemony and The Socialist Strategy*, London and New York, 2001, p.107.

²¹ See *ibid*, p. 108.

against it. But sometimes they tend to step beyond their framework thus exerting an inherent capacity for changing, transforming the reality, as an indication of their aptitude to construct and impact, and be self-transformed. Consequently, how does the discourse on the political suddenly turn into political discourse in terms of its time and place, more often remain ambiguous. May be, there is even no need to denote that transition and transformation. From the perspective of the possible intermingling, transition and transformation of these two, may not only Laclau's definition be understood, but also his doctrine or his joint project with Ch. Mouffe on radical democracy, where not only a reconsidered conceptual system and a framework are put forward, but also a apparent desire to turn those into a applicable policy and an action plan.

Key words: *human coexistence, scientific-philosophical intellectual horizon, nature of political, end in itself, instrumental, the distortion of political, performative capacity*

ՆԱԻՐԱ ՄԿՐՏՉՅԱՆ – Քաղաքականի բնույթն ու կարգավիճակը: Դիսկուրսներ քաղաքականի շուրջ և քաղաքական դիսկուրսներ – Հոդվածում քննարկվում է այն հիմնահարցը, թե ինչպես է գիտափիլիսոփայական մտահորիզոնում ըմբռնվել քաղաքականի բնույթը, և ինչպե՞ս է իմաստավորվել քաղաքականի կարգավիճակը: Հիմնավորվում է այն դրույթը, որի համաձայն գիտափիլիսոփայական հորիզոնում քաղաքականի բնույթի շուրջ էական մտատեղաշարժերն անխուսափելիորեն ազդում են նաև նրա կարգավիճակի նկատմամբ դիրքորոշումների վրա: Մասնավորապես, քաղաքականի ինքնին նպատակ լինելուց միջոցի վերածումը հանգեցրել է մարդկային համակեցության մեջ նրա դերի ու նշանակության նվազմանը: Քանի որ դիսկուրսներն օժտված են փերֆորմատիվ կարողությամբ, երբ վեր է հանվում իրականությունը փոխակերպելու և ինքնին փոխակերպվելու ներուճակությունը, ապա վերոնշյալը կարող է հանգեցնել քաղաքականի մահվան կամ հնարավոր այլակերպման ու վերացման պատճառ դառնալ:

Բանալի բառեր – *մարդկային համակեցություն, գիտափիլիսոփայական մտահորիզոն, քաղաքականի բնույթ, ինքնին նպատակ, ինստրումենտալ, քաղաքականի այլակերպում, փերֆորմատիվ կարողություն*

НАИРА МКРТЧЯН – Природа и статус политического. Дискурсы о политическом и политические дискурсы. – Как в научно-философском интеллектуальном горизонте постигается природа политического и осмысливается его статус? В статье выдвигается тезис, согласно которому фундаментальные интеллектуальные сдвиги неизбежно влияют на подходы к природе политического и его статусу. В частности, преобразование политического из цели в средство привело к снижению его роли. Поскольку дискурсы, выявляя потенциал, наделены перформативной силой трансформировать реальность и трансформироваться самим, это может привести к деформации либо уничтожению политического.

Ключевые слова: *человеческое сосуществование, научно-философский интеллектуальный горизонт, природа политического, самоцель, инструментальное, деформация политического, перформативная сила*