

Discontinuities: between powers and concepts

The Portuguese Journal of Political Science has been, in the last decade, one of the means at the service of the epistemic community of Portuguese political science for the expression and publicity of academic works in progress or in development. It seems certain that its attractiveness in Latin American circles has increased, namely in Brazil and in the Hispanic communities of the Americas, but on the other hand, despite the increase in its level of international indexation, we are witnessing a decrease in the contribution effort of Portuguese academics, more concerned with their indexed publication rates in Anglo-Saxon media and written in English, which their Universities are imposing. In these, a quantitative methodology in the approach to political science is unavoidably winning. It will be true that we will also have to follow this path, but some resistance to the Americanization of European culture established after the Second Great War of the last century has to be capable of expression channels, especially after the so-called Brexit, which will tend to change in the medium term, the setting in academic editions. Let's say that we are in a period of resistance in which the discontinuity of the academic model, in the face of external pressure, is very strong. In this way we can consider that we are between scientific powers and concepts.

It is worth remembering that political science among us was emerging and then received in Portugal, through our multiple scholars, whose in-depth inventory was carried out by José Adelino Maltez (Maltez, 2007, pp. 80–140), which clarifies as the political-legal matrix underlying it and sometimes remains. This explains how, first, Krausism, and then positivism, marked the evolution of studies in this area. In the work *Metodologias da Ciência Política [Methodologies of Political Science]* (Maltez, 2007) he lists the Portuguese path in this field, after having carried out an inventory of the implementation of the institutional models of the European and North American schools (Maltez, 2007, pp. 27–76), as well as the reference authors of each one, which represents a fundamental monitoring tool, which makes it possible to clarify, how and where, the different schools of Portuguese political science, often unconsciously, root their orientations.

These guidelines seem to be in question today. As if the interpretive, hermeneutic, and theorizing model of politics cannot be relevant among us. It is true that the relationship of the “political” object with the emitting center of the discipline of political science has not always been blessed. Since the foundation of the discipline in the late nineteenth century, there have been periodic proclamations of its “new” scientific character. Beginning in the 1950s, behavioural revolutionaries tried to purge the ranks of theorists — and had some success in it in one or two large and powerful political science departments in the US. For those driven by their scientific aspirations, it has always been important to distinguish ‘true’ scientific study from politics, from more humanistic approaches — and a certain conceptualization of politics bears the brunt of this.

In response, many policy theorists point out, that science and objectivity are immersed in a normativity that erroneously self-proclaimed “scientists” thus reject; and theorists are not inclined to accept the description of political “science” at face value. Policy theorists challenge the idea that their own work in normative theory lacks rigor, pointing to criteria within the political theory that differentiate them from less rigorous work. While resisting the epistemic assumptions of empiricism, many also point out that much of what counts as political theory is deeply involved in empirical politics: which, after all, could be more “real,” vital, and important than the symbols and categories that organize our lives and the structures of our understanding?

In terms of methodology, history as a point of reference has also been controversial, with recurrent debates about the extent to which theory is contained in its historical context and whether it is legitimately possible to use political principles of an era as a basis for criticizing the political practice of another. As a result, a strand of current debates in political science circles around the relationship between approaches that emphasize the specifics of historical or contemporary contexts and between the more abstract or hypothetical register of analytic philosophy. Those who work in close association with the traditions of analytic philosophy — and often prefer to call themselves political philosophers — have generated some of the most interesting and innovative work of recent decades. But they were also challenged repeatedly. Communitarians and poststructuralists argue that the individual of Rawlsian liberalism is not neutral, but an ideological premise with significant political effects not recognized in theoretical conclusions. Feminists criticize the analytical abstraction of bodily difference as a movement that reinforces heteronormative assumptions and gender inequalities. In this way, those who want to theorize in politics seem more vulnerable to criticism from “political scientists” when their normative explorations generate conclusions that cannot be plausibly implemented: principles of life, perhaps, that invoke the practices of societies; or principles of distribution that ignore the implosion of communism or the seemingly irresistible global spread of consumer ideas.

What is at issue here is not the status of political theory in relation to political science, but how theory relates to developments in the political world. Some think this is not possible. Against this, can be cited a large number of political theorists with an interest in contemporary political events, such as the formation of a European identity, the new international human rights regime and immigration policy, the evasion of the Geneva Conventions at the turn of the 20th century, or the appropriate policy response to natural disasters that prompts them to think about how to theorize these events. The concepts or figures of thought invoked here include Giorgio Agamben’s (1998) “naked life” of the human being to whom everything can be done by the State, Michel Foucault’s (1979) “disciplinary power” that conditions what people can think, that of Carl Schmitt (1985) “state of exception” in which the sovereign suspends the rule of law, the superhuman judge of Ronald Dworkin (1977) “Hercules”, the “unconditional hospitality” of Jacques Derrida (2000) to the other, or the “marks of the

sovereignty” of Étienne Balibar (2004)”. All, together, signal the arrogation for themselves by political actors of civil society, of rights and privileges of action, historically assumed by States. In this sense, those who theorize the political object take advantage of the experienced events, turning their attention to the challenges presented by the ecological crisis; for emergency or security policy; for the impact of new technologies on the ways we think about privacy, justice or the category of the human; for the impact of new migrations on ideas of race, tolerance, and multiculturalism; to the implications of growing global inequalities in the way we theorize freedom, equality, democracy, sovereignty or hegemony, in multiple institutions, including the university, such as the perestroika movement (2005) in academia.

To illuminate this debate, we open this issue of the PJPS, with two articles that discuss the political concepts that carry power, examples of conceptual discontinuities that matter. Then, in the second part, we include two articles that question the normativity of the political system, how it changes or conditions each other, namely at the level of relations between branches of science, in this case of political science with positive law, which demonstrate issues that cannot be forgotten. A third part is dedicated to the different spaces of power and how they condition themselves, in an empirical demonstration of different realities. As always, this issue also includes two book reviews that focus on some of the most recent debates. The first one is about the debate about race in North America and the other about the emergence of global studies, the most recent scientific emergency that appears portrayed in the centenary of international relations.

Finally, our thanks go to our usual team, with a special thanks for the work of Patrícia Tomás and to the artists Josep Fernandez Margalef and Rice, for the consent and transfer of the cover image, our usual choice of street art selection to which its name “Esperança” – HOPE (2020) is not unrelated, which is what we are all called to have, after the upheaval caused by the current pandemic that has changed our circumstances, of each and every one, in this global world.

References

- Maltez, J. A. 2007. *Metodologias da Ciência Política*. [Methodologies of Political Science] Lisbon: ISCSP.