



Research Workshop
“OTKA” thematic research project
(K143251)

Date: 10 April 2024, 9:30-12:00

Venue: University of Public Service, Ludovika Campus, Side Building, room 019

Topic: Book proposal (Bloomsbury Publishing)

Title: The Concept of the “Political” in Hungarian Political Thought (1500-1990)

Key words: History of Hungarian Political Thought; History of Central Europe; Political Philosophy; Legal Studies; Central European Literature, Hungarian Studies

Speakers: (members of the research project)

Ferenc Hörcher: Introduction to the contexts of ‘the political’ in Hungarian political thought

Gábor Petneházi: Unity and division. Transforming concepts of nation in Hungarian political thought at the turn of 16th and 17th centuries

Ádám Smrcz: The Body Politic, the Body Personal and their Interests in Hungarian Political Thought

Tamás Nyirkos: The meaning of “political” in the discourse of political religions: Hungary in the long 19th century

Kálmán Tóth: The Political Community in the Political Thinking of István Gorove

Kálmán Pócz: The concept of politics in the Hungarian textbooks in the late 19th and early 20th century (written together with Botond Jereb)

External reviewers:

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ABSTRACTS

Ferenc Hörcher: Introduction to the contexts of 'the political' in Hungarian political thought

This introductory chapter has two functions, this is why it is divided into two parts. First, it has to introduce the recently quite popular notion of 'the political', while secondly, it has to familiarize the reader with the actual historical-political context, where the concept will be applied. In order to fulfil the first task, the chapter presents two rival notions of the political. One of them will be identified as the Machiavellian-Schmittian paradigm, the other one the Aristotelian-Oakeshottian one. The first type tries to look at politics as a battlefield, where friends and enemies are fighting with each other, as long as possible by political means, but finally also arriving to the military ones. The political aim for them is to grasp and preserve power. The second type starts out from the assumption that humans are apt and ready to act in favour of the common good. Although conflicts are permanent in their communities, politics have standards, which point beyond the use and misuse of power, and which are based on the general interest. The introduction will argue that this second interpretation will serve as the model for the present venture, though the competition between the two notions will return in different contexts, as well.

The second part of the chapter will reconstruct the framework of the political discourse in the Hungarian political communities, and in particular in the Hungarian Monarchy, the conquered territories and in the Transylvanian Principality. It will refer to the debates around Werbőczy's customary law collection and the historical constitution, on the struggles for independence and the denominational disputes, on the rivalry between the aristocracy and the lower nobility in the Hungarian assembly, the debate on progress and social transformation, as well as the issues of delayed modernization and scapegoat mechanisms. It will end up with the three traumas of the 20th century, including the PostWW1 Treaty of Trianon, the Holocaust and 1956.

Gábor Petneházi: Unity and division. Transforming concepts of nation in Hungarian political thought at the turn of 16th and 17th centuries

The paper aims to outline the broader context and significance of two recently discovered source texts – a comprehensive reform draft written around 1580 (Libellus Paraeneticus) and a political pamphlet written around 1625 (Responsio) – attempting to determine how these two documents modify the existing picture of early modern 'Hungarian' or 'Hungarian and Transylvanian' politics. In fact, the lack of unity is precisely the main, and often still overlooked characteristic of the subject of our study; the disunity, marked by long periods of foreign intervention, occupation and civil wars, clearly left its mark on the early modern Hungarian political thought but it also influenced the development of the most basic concepts of nation and community. This phenomena was first documented by Katalin Péter (Péter, 1995). Her main finding was that in the period between the Battle of Mohács (1526) and the reconquest of Buda (1686), the concept of 'country', 'homeland' and 'nation' slowly drifted apart: by the end of the 17th century only 'nation' retained its unifying function, while 'homeland' and 'country' - in accordance with the political reality - have been diverged and fragmented. The paper argues that this change occurred much more rapidly as a result of the long Turkish war (1591–1606) and the Bocskai uprising (1604–1606) in the early 17th century, and that it has also fundamentally determined and modified the modern understanding of the political concept of Hungarian nation.

Ádám Smrcz: The Body Politic, the Body Personal and their Interests in Hungarian Political Thought

"I don't trust anyone, myself included, except when interests attract or oblige me". This self-disclosing statement was meant to express the *ars politica* of a seemingly Machiavellian character, regent Ulrich of Celje in Mihály Vörösmarty's historical drama, *Hunyadi László* (1844). Although such a claim could easily seem both epistemologically appealing and morally justifiable from a Machiavellian or Neo-Machiavellian perspective (viz. (Hont-Ignatieff 1986; Pocock 2003), the person of the speaker makes it clear right from the beginning, that it is not intended to be as such: Ulrich is only acting on behalf of his own self-interests irrespectively of the political consequences of his deeds.

Such a criticism may seem all the more surprising, since it was formulated in a time when - influenced by theoreticians like Mandeville and Smith - the words passion and vice were increasingly replaced by terms like advantage and interest in the vocabularies of Western opinion makers (Hirschman 2013), thereby turning former vices into virtues. The reason why this paradigm shift in moral questions could take place, I argue, was due to the fact that the novel episteme of political economy gained almost exclusive currency. However, as I intend to highlight in my talk, many - if not the most - prominent members of the Hungarian intelligentsia were highly sceptical of the moral and political value of this change: while sometimes these qualms were merely normative (viz. "one should not be acting solely based on his self-interest, otherwise it would be detrimental to the political community"), in some cases their criticism touched upon the very nature of decision making claiming that, besides the evident aspect of self-interest, each and every decision of ours implies a regard for the political community as well.

Tamás Nyirkos: The meaning of "political" in the discourse of political religions: Hungary in the long 19th century

In current literature, the term "political religion" usually means a secular ideology that shows morphological and functional analogies to traditional religions. The most prominent examples (nationalism and different totalitarian ideologies) suggest that such ideologies are enforced by the state to strengthen the unity of the political community. In Hungary, however, attempts to create a national religion were never exclusively secular but drew on the experience of different Christian denominations. The main purpose was to overcome the denominational divisions that proved to be an enduring feature of Hungarian society since the Reformation and establish unity by appropriating elements of both the Protestant and the Catholic tradition. Also, the main vehicle of such attempts was not the state but an intellectual elite, while large parts of society spontaneously adopted their narratives and symbolism. By comparing the two main forms of political religion it can be shown that their difference stems from distinctive approaches to the political. While the first views the state as the central political actor and political activity as an essentially secular undertaking, the second is based on the idea of the community and rejects a strict separation of politics from the religious and cultural tradition.

Kálmán Tóth: The Political Community in the Political Thinking of István Gorove

My chapter in the volume will present a case study focusing on the political thinking of István Gorove (1818–1881), one of the well-known and respected politicians and political thinkers of the Dual Monarchy. His approach to politics was a communitarian one, within the paradigm of classical liberalism. His political socialization made him an avid supporter of the classical liberal reform agenda in the late 1830s and 1840s. The main framework and reference point of his thinking about the political was the Hungarian nation as a political community.

I will argue that this nation-centred view of Gorove can by no means be considered a narrow-minded ethnic nationalist approach, as the universal concept of humanity also played an equally important role for him as a final point of reference, although this largest possible scale certainly shows an intent of final depoliticization. As can be reconstructed on the basis of his writings, Gorove perceived the political community related to the framework of nation-states, where he mainly focused on the practical implementation of classical liberal political concepts and institutions like freedom, equality before the law, just and proportional political representation, and governmental responsibility. While in theory Gorove was in favour of universal male suffrage, practical considerations restrained him for supporting its application. In my study, I will analyse how classical liberal theory and conservative ideas and prejudices were simultaneously forming his views on political participation and on the boundaries of the political community.

Kálmán Pócza – Botond Jereb: The concept of politics in the Hungarian textbooks in the late 19th and early 20th century

State-centered views of politics have dominated throughout the 19th century, but an incremental separation of political science from legal studies occurred in the second half of it. While political studies have still focused on state-activities and regarded the state as the center stage of political struggles, it became more and more obvious that political studies and legal studies have different subjects. Consequently, almost parallel with the replacement of the historical school of legal studies by the dogmatic view of public law, the scientific approach to politics became an autonomous field of research (Arczt 2004). This separation of political studies from legal studies has been also nicely reflected in the process how political science got its own Chair at University of Budapest (Budapesti Tudományegyetem) (1873). All of the subsequent holders of this Chair (Dezső Szilágyi, Győző Concha and Pál Szandtner) have written textbooks and introductions to the study of politics. It is self-evident that the concept and the conception of politics and the political elaborated in these textbooks are worth for an analysis if we want to understand what was the meaning of the terms 'politics' and 'political' in the academic context in the last decades of the 19th century and in the first half of the 20th century.

