Political Theory

Political Theory:
The State of the Discipline

Edited by

Evangelia Sembou

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INTRODUCTION

EVANGELIA SEMBOU

Political theory draws on a number of different disciplines, such as political science, philosophy, history and law. It is a broad sub-field and it includes political philosophy and the history of political thought. Its practitioners, depending on their background, bring different perspectives and approaches to the study of political thought, which (approaches) range from historical to normative. Moreover, political theory often draws on the insights of, as well as engages in a dialogue with, social theory, ethics and the philosophy of law. In addition, nowadays political theory has expanded to include the study of 'the international' (international political theory). For all these reasons political theory is a core subject taught in a variety of academic departments. Yet, paradoxically, there has been an increasing tendency in the past few years for political theory to be marginalized in the academy. This is because so much of academic policy concentrates on the main branches of the disciplines within which political theory falls. For instance, within political science most funding goes to public policy, the politics of different countries, comparative politics and European politics than it does to political theory. Within philosophy areas such as metaphysics, the philosophy of mind, the philosophy of language, the philosophy of science and ethics are considered to be more crucial than political philosophy. History departments focus on the study of different historical periods (i.e. Antiquity, Medieaval times, Modernity), the emphasis being on political, social, cultural and economic history, rather than on the history of ideas or intellectual history; and, even where the history of ideas is taught, the history of specifically *political* ideas forms a very small part thereof. Within international relations more resources are spent on the study of public international law, international institutions and organizations, foreign policy analysis and area studies than on international political theory. Even worse for political theory, social theory and the philosophy of law or legal philosophy with which it enters

into fruitful dialogue, are themselves 'weak'[1] areas within sociology and law, respectively.

The aim of this volume is to address this situation. What are the problems and the challenges that political theory faces today? What is its importance as a distinctive branch of enquiry? What are its main concerns? Indeed, given its breadth and variety of approaches, political theory may well be considered a discipline in its own right (as the proposed title of the book suggests). In my view, the fact that political thought operates across disciplinary boundaries and often challenges the boundaries of the aforesaid disciplines is one of its greatest strengths.

I.

To begin with, 'political thought', 'political theory', 'political philosophy' and the 'history of political thought' do not mean the same thing, although many practitioners and students of political theory or philosophy often use these terms interchangeably. Moreover, "There does seem to be a distinction between 'theory of politics' and 'political theory'".[2] To some extent, the aforesaid terms denote differences in method or approach. The different methods and approaches that political theorists adopt has been the subject-matter of David Leopold's and Marc Stears's collection, entitled *Political Theory: Methods and Approaches*, which consists of essays by Oxford political theorists, each of whom explore the merits and demerits of particular approaches to political theory.[3] While I agree that there are different ways of doing political theory, I also think that the above-mentioned terms have to do with boundaries – not necessarily disciplinary boundaries (although this, too, is the case), but boundaries that determine the scope of the subject-matter. Let us take each of the above terms in turn.

'Political thought' is the broadest of all the aforesaid terms. It incorporates much political thinking which would not count as a political

[1] By 'weak' I mean that social theory and legal philosophy experience within the disciplines of sociology and law respectively the same problems that political theory experiences within political science, i.e. the same marginalization as being less relevant to current issues in public policy. I do not mean that they are 'weak' because of a lack of research in those areas.

[2] E. Frazer, "Political Theory and the Boundaries of Politics", in D. Leopold and M. Stears (eds.), *Political Theory: Methods and Approaches* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2012, c. 2008), p. 171.

[3] D. Leopold and M. Stears (eds.), *Political Theory: Methods and Approaches* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2012, c. 2008).

theory or political *philosophy*, because it lacks the depth, analytical rigour or systematicity. Thus, for example, we can talk of Benito Mussolini's political thought; but it would not make sense to refer to Mussolini's political ideas as a political theory or political philosophy.[4] A political theory is a better organized group of ideas, operating at a higher level of abstraction – a theoretical reflection on political reality. Political thought also includes the political thinking that citizens exhibit in their everyday life, as well as the political analysis found in newspaper editorials; it includes the actual, concrete thinking about politics found in parliamentary debates, election manifestoes, pamphlets, popular literature and *belles lettres*, film and other visual and aural displays.[5]

'Political philosophy' operates at a high lever of abstraction; it is an analytical and normative enterprise. It examines basic political concepts, such as liberty, justice, equality, legitimacy and rights; justifies principles meant to help us organize political society; and constructs a blueprint of a just society (this latter constitutes its prescriptive dimension). Political philosophy often starts from certain assumptions about human nature – these may be descriptive claims about the nature of human beings and about how humans behave or act – and proceeds to make prescriptive and normative claims about how human beings *ought* to organize themselves politically. Some political philosophers consider political philosophy to be a branch of moral philosophy; that is to say, they view political philosophy as that branch of moral philosophy that concerns itself with moral rules as applied to states. Daniel McDermott says, for example: "Political philosophers traffic in 'oughts' – *moral* oughts."[6] In his discussion of 'analytical political philosophy', McDermott says that analytical political philosophy is "a complement to social science".[7] He notes that the label "analytical" is often used to distinguish it from other ways of doing philosophy, "such as Continental and Eastern"; "It is also typically associated with certain features, such as clarity, systematic rigour, narrowness of focus, and an emphasis on the importance of reason." But probably the best way to characterize it is that "analytical political philosophy is an approach to gaining knowledge that falls into the same

[4] One can refer to Mussolini's philosophy only in a loose sense.
[5] M. Freeden, "Thinking Politically and Thinking About Politics: Language, Interpretation, and Ideology", in Leopold and Stears (eds.), *Political Theory*, p. 206.
[6] D. McDermott, "Analytical Political Philosophy", in Leopold and Stears (eds.), *Political Theory*, p 12.
[7] *Ibid*., p. 11.

broad category as science".[8] In order to substantiate this claim, McDermott makes use of a number of analogies, focusing on the development and testing of theories in both political theory and the natural sciences.[9] He concludes that "Political philosophy is not about getting things done – it is about discovering the truth".[10] Not that McDermott's portrayal of analytical political philosophy is in accord with how most (analytical) political philosophers would understand their project. Most political philosophers would agree with Leca that "the validity of political philosophy's discoveries should be viewed as different from scientific discoveries";[11] "philosophical 'truths' do not have the same status as scientific ones".[12] For example, although the idea of 'human rights' is widely accepted in most countries today, it is difficult to establish with certainty the scope of 'human rights'.[13] What exactly is the list of 'human

[8] *Ibid*.
[9] *Ibid*., pp. 17-24.
[10] *Ibid*., p. 25.
[11] J. Leca, "Political Philosophy in Political Science: Sixty Years On. Part II: Current Features of Contemporary Political Philosophy", *International Political Science Review*, Vol. 32 No. 1 (January 2011), p. 98.
[12] *Ibid*., p. 99.
[13] See, *inter alia*, M. Cranston, *What Are Human Rights?* (London: Bodley Head, 1973); J. R. Pennock and J. W. Chapman (eds.), *Human Rights* (New York: New York University Press, 1981); J. Donnelly, *The Concept of Human Rights* (London: Croom Helm, 1985) and *Universal Human Rights in Theory and Practice*, 2nd edn (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2003); A. J. M. Milne, *Human Rights and Human Diversity: An Essay in the Philosophy of Human Rights* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1986); J. W. Nickel, *Making Sense of Human Rights: Philosophical Reflections on the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1987); M. J. Perry, *The Idea of Human Rights: Four Inquiries* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998); C. R. Beitz, "Human Rights as a Common Concern", *The American Political Science Review*, Vol. 95 (2001), pp. 269-282; "What Human Rights Mean", *Daedalus*, Vol. 132 No. 1 (2003), pp. 36-46 and *The Idea of Human Rights* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009); G. Youngs, "Private Pain/Public Peace: Women's Rights as Human Rights and Amnesty International's Report on Violence against Women", *Signs: Journal of Women, Culture and Society*, Vol. 28 No. 4 (2003), pp. 1209-29; A. Sen, "Elements of a Theory of Human Rights", *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, Vol. 32 (2004), pp. 315-356; T. Pogge (ed.), *Freedom From Poverty as a Human Right: Who Owes What to the Very Poor?* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

rights'?[14] Are certain social and economic rights also 'human rights'? As it has been argued:

> Many Third World countries do not currently have the resources to provide the goods concerned. Is it not absurd to tell people they have rights to goods which cannot possibly be provided? And would it not be equally absurd to attribute different *human* rights to people in different parts of the world or living at different times? The other questionable feature of socio-economic 'human' rights is that for any specific person the corresponding obligation to provide the good falls upon a particular government: a right to that good would therefore seem to be held as a citizen of a particular society rather than as member of the human race.[15]

So "Political philosophy always seeks a balance, different depending on practical contexts, between values…or the 'politics of faith' and the 'politics of scepticism'".[16] I agree with Leca that this is not a weakness but a strength; it is "the enduring strength of contemporary political philosophy…to accept as a truth the plurality of reality and so the reasonable pluralism of different philosophies, by nature partial and incomplete, without falling into the relativism of mere opinions".[17] Most political philosophers derive their principles from an existing consensus or

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[14] The two most important documents on human rights are the "United Nations Declaration of Human Rights" (1948) [available from: http://www.un.org/Overview/rights.html] – also available in W. M. Sullivan and W. Kymlicka (eds.), *The Globalization of Ethics* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 213-218 and the "European Convention on Human Rights". Other documents include the "Asian Human Rights Charter" (1998) [http://material.ahrchk.net/charter/mainfile.php/eng_charter/] – also available in Sullivan and Kymlicka, *The Globalization of Ethics*, pp. 268-282; the "Cairo Declaration on Human Rights in Islam" (1990) [http://www.religlaw.org/interdocs/docs/cairohrislam1990.htm] – also available in *ibid*., pp. 257-262; the "International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights" (1966) [http://www.hrweb.org/legal/undocs.html] – also available in *ibid*., pp. 219-228; the "International Covenant on Social, Economic and Cultural Rights" (1966) [http://www.hrweb.org/legal/undocs.html] – also available in *ibid*., pp. 229-235; and the "Universal Islamic Declaration of Human Rights" (1980) [http://www.alhewar.com/ ISLAMDECL.html] – also available in *ibid*., pp. 247-256.

[15] P. Jones, "Human Rights", D. Miller et al (eds.), *The Blackwell Encyclopaedia of Political Thought* (Oxford and Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2002, c. 1991), p. 224.

[16] Leca, "Political Philosophy in Political Science: Sixty Years On. Part II", p. 99. Leca is referring to M. Oakeshott, *The Politics of Faith and the Politics of Scepticism* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1996).

[17] *Ibid*.

from a hypothetical agreement among rational individuals – a famous example of a hypothetical agreement behind a so-called "veil of ignorance" in "the original position" being Rawls's *A Theory of Justice* (1971).[18]

It is more difficult to establish a difference in approach and subject-matter between 'political theory' and 'political philosophy'. Nor is this difference simply that political philosophy is taught in philosophy departments as a branch of philosophy and political theory in politics departments as a branch of political science or political studies.[19] In reality, things are more complicated. Most practitioners seem to belong to both camps and to be doing both. Both political theorists and philosophers ask questions, such as: What is the relation between the state and society? What is the nature of equality? On what basis should goods and services be distributed to citizens? Should there be a welfare state? Is civil disobedience justified? When does a state lose its legitimacy? Where should the line between the 'public' and the 'private' be drawn? Equally, both political theorists and political philosophers are concerned with the meaning of key political ideas, such as power, authority, the state, political obligation, resistance and so forth. It is certainly not easy to tell whether Rawls's *A Theory of Justice* is a work of political theory or political philosophy, for instance. And this work is taught in both politics and philosophy departments worldwide. I think the difference lies rather in the approach one adopts. For example, Plato's *Republic* can be regarded as a work on political *philosophy* because Plato places his political philosophy within his philosophy as a whole; that is, Plato's views on politics cannot be dissociated from his ethics, metaphysics and epistemology; one has to understand his Theory of Forms and his conception of the soul in order to fully appreciate his 'ideal state'.[20] The same can be said of Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*;[21] Hegel intended his political philosophy to be understood as part of his philosophical system.[22] Thus, the practitioner of

[18] J. Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1971; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972).

[19] In this I disagree with Paul Kelly; see P. Kelly, "Political Theory – The State of the Art", *Politics*, Vol. 26 No. 1 (2006), p. 47.

[20] Plato, *The Republic*, ed. G. R. F. Ferrari, trans. T. Griffith (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000). See also E. Sembou, *Plato's Political Philosophy* (Exeter and Charlottesville: Imprint Academic, 2012).

[21] *Hegel's Philosophy of Right*, translated with notes by T. M. Knox (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967).

[22] See T. Brooks, *Hegel's Political Philosophy: A Systematic Reading of the Philosophy of Right* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009).

political philosophy who sets out to examine Plato's *Republic* will also attempt to grasp the main Platonic doctrines in order to be able to interpret Plato's political philosophy by locating it within Plato's philosophy as a whole. The political theorist will not expend as much energy examining the Platonic theories of Forms and the soul, although she too will have to have some understanding thereof, of course, in order to comprehend the importance of the city-soul analogy in Plato's *Republic*. Similarly, the political philosopher will spend more time on Hegel's philosophical system in order to explicate Hegel's *Philosophy of Right* than a political theorist is likely to do. That is what I mean by difference in approach between political philosophy and political theory, although I recognize that this is not absolute. As I have already said, many scholars of the subject do both, depending on the nature of their immediate project at hand. But there is also another view of 'political theory' and this is embraced by certain political scientists or even some political theorists who work in politics departments. According to this view, political theory has the same relationship to empirical political research as, say, theoretical physics to applied physics; that is, the task of political theory is to translate the insights and data of political research into a coherent and comprehensive theory, able to explain and even predict political behaviour and political developments.[23] Arguably, in the *Leviathan* Hobbes engaged in this type of political theorizing in addition to normative political theory. As David Robertson has put it:

> Ideally political theory should probably be defined as trying to combine the empirical truths about human political reactions with the moral truths of what is politically desirable by designing institutions and constitutions which will generate the desirable by harnessing human political nature.[24]

According to another view, "political theory", "as distinct from political philosophy", consists in "the *study* of actual political thinking (or thought)",[25] which examines two dimensions: "first, the features that distinguish thinking *politically* from other kinds of thinking; second, the ideational configurations – known as ideologies – that shape existing patterns of thinking *about* politics."[26] The first dimension that political theory examines is thus the political thinking exhibited by different actors

[23] D. Robertson, *The Penguin Dictionary of Politics* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1986), pp. 266-267.
[24] *Ibid*., p. 267.
[25] Freeden, "Thinking Politically and Thinking About Politics", in Leopold and Stears (eds.), *Political Theory*, p. 197.
[26] *Ibid*.

in society – citizens, journalists, politicians and activists – and which we classified as instances of 'political thought' above. For Freeden,

> Thinking politically refers to a range of particular thought-practices of, and concerning, collectivities. They include the construction of collective visions of a good society, the exercise of power through speech and writings, the distribution of significance and the ranking of priorities, the languages through which support for political entities is offered or withheld, and the endeavours to justify the exercise of ultimate control over the boundaries and jurisdictions of all fields of social activity.[27]

So political theorists analyze all debate taking place in the public sphere. This need not be exclusively *political* discourse, but may be a debate about issues that have wide social and political implications, as, for example, whether the marriage of homosexuals should be recognized, or whether abortion should be legal or illegal. The second dimension that Freeden identifies consists in the study of ideologies, an area where Freeden's contribution has been noteworthy.[28] It should be noted that, although ideology is an instance of political thinking – more accurately, a set of political ideas – and, as such, falls under the rubric of 'political thought', an ideology is not a 'political theory'. Rather, it is the object of political theory and ideologies are usually studied as part of political theory in politics departments. However, they are not regarded as an object of political philosophy by practitioners who work in philosophy departments.[29]

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[27] Freeden, "Thinking Politically and Thinking About Politics", in Leopold and Stears (eds.), *Political Theory*, pp. 197-198.

[28] See, for example, M. Freeden, "Political Concepts and Ideological Morphology", *The Journal of Political Philosophy*, Vol. 2 No. 2 (1994), pp. 145-161; *Ideologies and Political Theory: A Conceptual Approach* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996); *Ideology: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003); *Journal of Political Ideologies* (Abington: Carfax Publishing, Taylor & Francis Ltd). Also work on specific political ideologies, e.g. M. Freeden, *The New Liberalism: An Ideology of Social Reform* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978) and *Liberalism Divided: A Study in British Political Thought, 1914-1939* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986).

[29] So 'political philosophy', understood as a sub-field of philosophy, does not concern itself with ideologies. Political philosophers with a background in philosophy do not seem to be interested in ideologies, which they regard as an object of political science, not of philosophy. We are back to the issue of disciplinary boundaries and the way practitioners with different disciplinary backgrounds conceive their task.

Let us now look at the difference between 'political theory' and 'theory of politics'. According to Elizabeth Frazer,

> Terminology here is by no means fixed, but we can take it that the grammatical locution *theory of politics* connotes a certain theoretical (contemplative, or scientific) distance between the theorist and her activity of theorizing, on the one hand, and the object of her theory, on the other. *Political theory*, by contrast, seems to make political a predicate of theory. That is, it seems to emphasize the extent to which the theory has political effects, or a political context, or constitutes a definite political intervention.[30]

Elizabeth Frazer raises the question of the boundaries of political theory's subject-matter. In particular, she asks: "…what is the 'politics' that we might have a theory of?"[31] She notes that politics "encompasses analytically, but often not empirically, distinct elements", namely, policy and "the competition for the power to govern". The very concept 'politics' is complex and ambiguous. Unlike in English, in French, German and Italian there is one word which means both policy and politics – 'la politique', 'die Politik', 'la politica'.[32] She demonstrates how the term 'politics' is used in a variety of ways with different meanings in each case, sometimes with positive, at other times with negative, and often with neutral connotations. What complicates matters, as far as political theory in the academy is concerned, she says, is that political studies as a discipline, including political theory, "has, at different times and in different places, been very much a state-oriented enterprise".[33] As a result, what counts as 'political science' and, accordingly, as 'political theory' has often been determined by the state. Thus, whereas in some countries at some times the training of political scientists and aspiring governmental administrators has been the same, in other countries (or in the same countries at other times) academic training and administrative training are regarded as separate. At some times governments have demanded of university politics departments to research into certain issues relating to public policy; at other times or in other countries academic research and research undertaken by government agencies are separate.[34] Frazer also remarks that a contentious issue is the extent to which politics is conceived

[30] Frazer, "Political Theory and the Boundaries of Politics", p. 171.
[31] *Ibid*., p. 172.
[32] *Ibid*. I add that in Greek too there is only one word (πολιτική) which means both politics and policy.
[33] *Ibid*.
[34] *Ibid*., p. 175.

as separate from the rest of life,[35] and points to the disagreements across and within academic disciplines over different methodologies.[36] She distinguishes between those who see politics to be concerned mainly with 'means' and those who view politics as a preoccupation with 'ends', and proceeds to examine different conceptions of politics, namely, 'Machiavellian', 'Weberian', 'Platonic', 'Aristotelian' and 'Arendtian' conceptions thereof.[37] Accordingly, the boundaries of what counts as 'political' and the limits of interest of the discipline of political theory are by no means fixed. Frazer concludes: "These points of contention might helpfully be seen as dimensions of the complex concept 'politics'." These dimensions are the following: first, the '*state-society-individual*', that is, the relationship between the state, society and the individual, a crucial point of contention being whether politics is coextensive with the state or whether it also encompasses society and certain aspects of people's lives; second, '*publicity-secrecy*', viz. the extent to which politics is characterized by visibility and transparency or by cunning, manipulativeness and mystery; third, '*deliberation*', i.e. whether political action is deliberate, prudential and decisive or human beings are victims of power structures, economic forces and irrational processes; fourth, '*openness-closure*', to wit, whether political decisions are subject to revision or "so decisive as to constitute a form of violence".[38]

The 'history of political thought' is a sub-field at the intersection of politics and history. It examines the writings of key political thinkers against their historical and intellectual background. Historians of political thought start from the premise that a work is illuminated by its context. As one practitioner puts it:

> All writers on politics, and even political theorists, however abstract their work may seem, are reacting, and so contributing, to events of their times. One understands them better if one bears that in mind.[39]

It is not without significance that Hobbes wrote his *Leviathan* while he was in exile in Paris; he had been in exile since 1640, having published works that supported the king against parliament during the English Civil War. When *Leviathan* appeared in England in the spring of 1651 the king had been executed (in January 1649) and *Leviathan* seemed to justify

[35] *Ibid*., p. 176.
[36] *Ibid*., pp. 176-180.
[37] *Ibid*., pp. 180-190.
[38] *Ibid*., p. 194.
[39] M. Levin, *Political Thought in the Age of Revolution 1776-1848* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), p. 13.

obedience to the republic and the separation of church and state. The shock of the royalists was immense.[40] Not only is Hobbes's political theory an attempt to bring political stability at the time of the Civil War between Charles I and Parliament and a period of political and constitutional instability until the Restoration (in 1660); simultaneously, the methodology of *Leviathan* is influenced by the newly emergent natural sciences. Hobbes was influenced by Galileo and drew on mathematics – in particular, geometry – from which he derived the method of *deduction*, that is to say, a reasoning (or ratiocination, as Hobbes terms it) which starts with a definition, or definitions, on the basis of which one arrives at new definitions, and so on, until one reaches something known. Hobbes believed that he could apply the same method to all fields of human knowledge, thereby providing a unitary understanding of the world; natural science, psychology and politics – the three sections of his *Elements of Philosophy* [*Elementorum Philosophiae*] –[41] were all based on the same scientific model. It is also important that Hobbes did not see himself as primarily (or solely) a political philosopher, but as one of those thinkers like Bacon and Descartes who were concerned with the nature and status of philosophical enquiry. Consequently, his political theory should be seen as a part of his philosophical system. An historian of political thought would examine both the historical context (i.e. the English Civil War and the political developments that led to the Restoration) in which Hobbes's *Leviathan* emerged and the intellectual (scientific) background against which Hobbes was writing. To take another example from ancient political thought, when Aristotle wrote the *Politics*[42] the classical city-state was in demise. He thought that the *polis*'s demise was due to internal weakness, the degeneracy of morals and political corruption. It is a moot point to what extent Aristotle was right and to what extent the demise of the *polis* can be attributed to the expansionist policies of Macedon. As a commentator has said:

> In retrospect, Aristotle's teaching may appear as a post-mortem analysis of the Greek city-state, but it was inspired by the hope of regeneration. Aristotle's *Politics* must be read in large part as a defence of classical Greek values, and in particular of those which make citizenship central to

[40] T. Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ed. R. Tuck (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. ix.
[41] *De Corpore* (1655), *De Homine* (1658) and *De Cive* (1642).
[42] Aristotle, *The Politics*, ed. S. Everson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

> the good and rational life of man which came to be embodied in the classical republican tradition.[43]

So, historians of political thought argue, political thinkers engage – theoretically and practically – with the social and political events of their time. It is for this reason that their political writings should be examined against their political, cultural and intellectual backgrounds. Edmund Burke defended the American colonists in their dispute with the British Monarchy and criticized the events taking place in France during the French Revolution.[44] As a Member of Parliament, he was in a position to influence government policy in both these cases. A famous tradition of history of political thought is the 'Cambridge School'.[45] The 'Cambridge

[43] A. Lockyer, "Aristotle: *The Politics*", in M. Forsyth and M. Keens-Soper (eds.), *The Political Classics: A Guide to the Essential Texts from Plato to Rousseau* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), p 38.

[44] See E. Burke, *Speeches and Letters on American Affairs* (London: Dent, 1961) and *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, edited with an introduction by L. G. Mitchell (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), respectively.

[45] Famous exponents of the 'Cambridge School' are John Dunn, Quentin Skinner, John Pocock and James Tully, among others. For example, see: J. Dunn, *Modern Revolutions: An Introduction to the Analysis of A Political Phenomenon* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972); *Western Political Theory in the Face of the Future* (Cambridge University Press, 1979 and 1993); *Political Obligation in its Historical Context: Essays in Political Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980); *Rethinking Modern Political Theory: Essays 1979-83* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985); *The History of Political Theory and Other Essays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); *Setting the People Free: The Story of Democracy* (London: Atlantic Books, 2005), inter alia – Dunn is renowned for his work on Locke: J. Dunn, *The Political Thought of John Locke: A Historical Account of the Argument of the 'Two Treatises of Government'* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969) and *Locke* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984); Q. Skinner, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought*, 2 volumes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978); *Reason and Rhetoric in the Philosophy of Hobbes* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); *Visions of Politics*, 3 volumes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002) and *Hobbes and Republican Liberty* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), inter alia; J. G. A. Pocock, *Politics, Language and Time: Essays on Political Thought and History* (London: Methuen, 1972); *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975); *Virtue, Commerce, and History: Essays on Political Thought and History, chiefly in the Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985) and *Political Thought and History: Essays on Theory and Method* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press,

School' holds the view that the importance of political texts can only be understood in historical terms and its practitioners have also written much on methodology. One of the most important contributions of the 'Cambridge School' has been the 'Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought'. Other renowned practitioners of the history of political thought are Iain Hampsher-Monk and Janet Coleman, who have also edited the journal *History of Political Thought* (published by Imprint Academic in Exeter) since 1980.[46] Apart from the writings of major political thinkers, the history of political thought also examines the work of a cluster of thinkers living in a certain epoch or engaging with a particular historic event. Thus, one can study Enlightenment political thought, British political thought in the nineteenth century or political thought in twentieth-century Europe; alternatively, one can concentrate on a single event, say, the French Revolution, and consider how the thought of certain political thinkers (e.g. Jean-Jacques Rousseau) influenced developments and how others reacted thereto (e.g. Edmund Burke and Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel).[47]

No doubt, there are practitioners who focus on one of the foregoing – political theory, political philosophy or history of political thought. Moreover, there are others who work across the boundaries of political theory and political philosophy or political theory and the history of

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2009), inter alia; J. Tully, *Meaning and Context: Quentin Skinner and his Critics* (Cambridge: Polity, 1988).

[46] I. Hampsher-Monk's *A History of Modern Political Thought: Major Political Thinkers from Hobbes to Marx* (Oxford and Malden, Mass.: Blackwell, 1992) and J. Coleman's *A History of Political Thought: From Ancient Greece to Early Christianity* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000) and *A History of Political Thought: From the Middle Ages to the Renaissance* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000) have introduced countless students to the subject. See also J. Coleman and P. M. Kitromilides (eds.), *In the Footsteps of Herodotus: Towards European Political Thought* (Firenze: L. S. Olshki, 2012).

[47] Arguably, Rousseau's ideas in *The Social Contract* (published in 1762) inspired the French Revolution. Moreover, in the period from November 1793 to July 1794 the Jacobins attempted to organize government on the basis of principles drawn from this same work. See J.-J. Rousseau, *The Social Contract*, translated and introduced by M. Cranston (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968). Burke criticized the French Revolution in his *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, while Hegel's skepticism as regards the French Revolution in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* is also well-known. Specifically, Hegel was very critical of the Robespierrists and their policies during the radical phase of the Revolution; he also criticized Rousseau's notion of the "general will". See G. W. F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A. V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), pp. 357-361.

political thought. It is perhaps an oversimplication to say that each of the aforesaid falls into a different discipline – to wit, political theory in political science, political philosophy in philosophy and the history of political thought in history –, although this is true to some extent. In fact, most scholars of political thought undertake interdisciplinary work. This is one of the reasons why political theory/philosophy often has a problematic relationship to disciplines and academic departments.[48] Not only do many practitioners cross disciplinary boundaries in their research; actually, there are many benefits for doing so. Therein lies, I submit, the strength of the subject. As Michael Freeden has said:

> We can – and do – focus on each separately, but at some cost to an overall understanding of political thinking. The alternative is to work with different combinations of those approaches, depending on the primary target of our research: that is to say, what work do we ultimately want our subject material to perform for us: (*a*) map and interpret the ranges and features of political thinking, the clusters of conceptual combinations they display, and their relative weighting and significance, and engage in comparative analysis of theories and ideologies; (*b*) produce a critique of the logic or ethical content of a political argument and offer justifiable improvements on those; or (*c*) identify the contributions of individuals to the corpus of political thought, and the contexts of their writings, as they have accumulated, or diminished, over time.[49]

For example, depending on one's approach, John Stuart Mill's *On Liberty* can be studied in different ways and with different objectives in mind.[50] Historians of political thought will concentrate on the work's historical and intellectual context; they will examine its place in the development of utilitarianism; and will also consider the differences between the early and late Mill.[51] They will also take into account Mill's career in public service

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[48] In Britain this is also evident in the way funding for research in political theory is divided between the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) and the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC).

[49] Freeden, "Thinking Politically and Thinking About Politics", p. 214.

[50] I am borrowing this example from Freeden, *ibid*., p. 215. See J. S. Mill, "On Liberty", in *On Liberty and Other Writings*, ed. S. Collini (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992, c. 1989), pp. 1-115.

[51] The Mill of *On Liberty* (published in 1859) is very different from the Mill of the "Chapters on Socialism" (published in the *Fortnightly Review* twenty years later in 1879), although I believe that ultimately both Mill's liberalism and his socialism can be understood in terms of his utilitarianism. See J. S. Mill, "Chapters on Socialism" in *ibid*., pp. 219-279. See also J. C. Rees, "The Thesis of the Two Mills", *Political Studies*, Vol. XXV (1977). For Mill's essay on "Utilitarianism"

(as a civil servant in the East India Company and an MP). Political philosophers will adopt an analytical approach, focusing on the harm principle and Mill's distinction between "self-regarding" and "other-regarding" acts. Political theorists will examine Mill's link of individuality with liberty and progress, seeing *On Liberty* as an expression of liberalism as an ideology. It immediately becomes apparent that several practitioners will combine two or more of the above approaches; they may combine an historical with a political theoretical approach or a political theoretical with a more analytical philosophical approach. Such a combination of approaches certainly leads to a more comprehensive understanding of Mill's political thought (as well as of Mill's essay *On Liberty*). To take another example, one can examine Hobbes's *Leviathan* contextually, from an historical perspective, against the background of the English Civil War and the period of political and constitutional instability until the Restoration (the task of the history of political thought) or analytically, focusing on the structure of Hobbes's argument from the state of nature through the social contract to the Commonwealth (the task of analytical political philosophy); alternatively, one may seek to determine the extent to which Hobbes's political thought laid the foundations of liberalism (the task of political theory). Once again, these three approaches can be combined.

II.

One of the challenges that political theory faces today is its relevance to public policy. In the U.K. this issue has become particularly pressing in view of the requirements of the Research Excellence Framework (REF) and its emphasis on impact. It is sad that practitioners of the subject have to justify their discipline to relevant governmental and non-governmental bodies, and to policy-makers, as the task and significance of political theory should be pretty straightforward. Political theory elucidates the concepts that politicians and policy-makers (as well as citizens) use everyday – e.g. justice, equality, fairness, rights and so forth –, analyzes political principles and makes explicit the assumptions implicit in many policy decisions. As Adam Swift and Stuart White have noted, there can be no value-free appraisal of policy proposals.[52] Whether politicians and

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see J. S. Mill, *On Liberty and Other Essays*, edited with an introduction by J. Gray (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), pp. 129-201.

[52] A. Swift and S. White, "Political Theory, Social Science, and Real Politics", in Leopold and Stears (eds.), *Political Theory*, p. 50.

policy-makers realize it or not, the policy decisions that they make are underpinned by certain normative assumptions. For example, a socialist government's decision to raise property taxes to the rich is based on a belief in redistribution; a policy in favour of the expansion of the welfare state is based on a different conception of human nature, justice and equality than a policy in favour of the limitation of the welfare state; different normative assumptions also underlie different policy decisions over immigration laws and arguments over whether there should be private universities or not. The task of the political theorist is to examine and clarify the assumptions that underlie policy decisions, as well as to shed new insights that may be helpful to policy-making. This, I submit, is also the public role of the political theorist. True, as Swift and White have noted, despite the crucial role of political theory to the policy-making process, it is also limited and modest for two reasons: first, political theorizing does not offer policy prescriptions per se; second, the vocations of the political theorist and the politician are different – in democratic societies politicians want to win elections and to govern.[53] Moreover, a particular complication that arises when political theorists engage with public policy is that they tend to overgeneralize and to ignore the facts. So when they engage with public policy political theorists need to look at the relevant empirical evidence in order to support their claims;[54] they also need to bear in mind "the difference between ideal and non-ideal theory".[55] To be sure, these difficulties are not insurmountable. Political theorists who have engaged with public policy in Britain are, Albert Weale and Jonathan Wolff,[56] among others, both at University College London.[57]

However, political theorists need not get involved with public policy directly. Another issue that political theorists need to consider seriously is the extent to which their political theorizing affects public policy indirectly, either because their theory has political implications – thus, the theory may be seized by politicians and policy-makers and applied in one way or another – or because they may influence public opinion. For this to happen, political theorists need to be public intellectuals as well; famous

[53] *Ibid*., p. 49.
[54] *Ibid*., pp. 56-57.
[55] *Ibid*., p. 58.
[56] A. Weale, *Equality and Social Policy* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978), *Political Theory and Social Policy* (London: Macmillan, 1983) and several journal articles. Jonathan Wolff examines how theories of distributive justice can be applied to public policy.
[57] A. Weale is based in the Department of Political Science, while J. Wolff is based in the Department of Philosophy.

public intellectuals include Michel Foucault (in the 1970s and 1980s), Jürgen Habermas, Charles Taylor and Martha Nussbaum, among others.[58]

In the past two decades political theory has increasingly preoccupied itself with 'the international'[59] and with global issues. Hence the interest in 'cosmopolitanism' and the emergence of notions such as 'global citizenship', 'global ethics', 'world government', 'transnational governance', 'global civil society', 'world state', 'global justice' and so forth.[60] This

[58] Habermas has often commented on issues ranging from the European Union to human rights in German newspapers such as *Die Zeit*. Taylor's views on multiculturalism influenced public opinion in Quebec; in 2007 he served with Gérard Bouchard on a commission on Reasonable Accommodation in respect of cultural differences in Quebec. See Nussbaum's famous manifesto for the liberal arts, entitled *Not for Profit: Why Democracy Needs the Humanities* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2010).

[59] See, among others, C. Brown, *International Relations Theory: New Normative Approaches* (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1992); "The Borders of (International) Political Theory", in N. O'Sullivan (ed.), *Political Theory in Transition* (London: Routledge, 2000), pp. 190-208; "International Political Theory: A British Social Science?', *British Journal of Politics and International Relations*, Vol. 2 No. 1 (2000), PP. 114-123; "Political Theory and International Relations", in G. F. Gaus and C. Kukathas (eds.), *Handbook of Political Theory* (London: Sage, 2004), pp. 289-300 and K. Hutchings, *International Political Theory: Rethinking Ethics in A Global Era* (London: Sage, 1999).

[60] On 'cosmopolitanism' see, for example, C. Brown, "Cosmopolitanism, World Citizenship and Global Civil Society", *Critical Review of International Social and Political Philosophy*, Vol. 3 No. 1 (2000), pp. 7-26; C. R. Beitz, "Cosmopolitanism and Global Justice", *Journal of Ethics*, Vol. 9 Nos. 1-2 (2005), pp. 11-27; K. A. Appiah, *Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a World of Strangers* (London: Penguin, 2007); T. Erskine, *Embedded Cosmopolitanism: Duties to Strangers and Enemies in a World of 'Dislocated Communities'* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008); D. Held, *Cosmopolitanism: Ideals and Realities* (Cambridge and Malden: Polity, 2010); G. W. Brown and D. Held (eds.), *The Cosmopolitanism Reader* (Cambridge: Polity, 2010). On 'global citizenship' see, inter alia, A. Carter, *The Political Theory of Global Citizenship* (London and New York: Routledge, 2001); and N. Dower and J. Williams (eds.), *Global Citizenship: A Critical Reader* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2002). On 'global ethics' see e.g. J. Eade and D. O'Byrne (eds.), *Global Ethics and Civil Society* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005); T. Pogge and K. Horton (eds.), *Global Ethics: Seminal Essays* (St. Paul: Paragon House, 2008); M. Frost, *Global Ethics: Anarchy, Freedom and International Relations* (London: Routledge, 2009); K. Hutchings, *Global Ethics: An Introduction* (Cambridge and Malden: Polity, 2010); H. Widdows, *Global Ethics: An Introduction* (Durham: Acumen, 2011). On 'world government' see e.g. C. Campbell, "The Resurgent Idea of World Government", *Ethics and International Affairs*, Vol. 22 (2008), pp. 133-142. On 'transnational governance'

preoccupation with the 'international' or the 'global' is not only due to global developments, but, more importantly, it is argued, it is due to the challenge of the Westphalian assumption that there is a divide between the domestic affairs of states and the international order.[61] At the same time, many problems of our contemporary world – poverty, over-population, migration, growing inequalities, climate change, the depletion of natural resources, violation of human rights and terrorism – have no borders or, put differently, cannot be solved by one country on its own. Much contemporary political theory deals with such challenges of our globalized world.[62]

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see, inter alia, K. Dingwerth, *The New Governance: Transnational Government and Democratic Legitimacy* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmilla, 2007). On 'global civil society' see e.g. Brown, "Cosmopolitanism, World Citizenship and Global Civil Society"; R. Germain and M. Kenny, *The Idea of Global Civil Society: Ethics and Politics in a Globalizing Era* (London: Routledge, 2004) and G. Baker and D. Chandler (eds.), *Global Civil Society: Contested Futures* (London: Routledge, 2005). On 'world state' see e.g. M. Shaw, *Theory of the Global State: Globality as an Unfinished Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000). On 'global justice' see, among others, T. Pogge (ed.), *Global Justice* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001); Beitz, "Cosmopolitanism and Global Justice"; S. Caney, *Justice Beyond Borders: A Global Political Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005); D. Miller, *National Responsibility and Global Justice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007); T. Brooks (ed.), *The Global Justice Reader* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2008); T. Pogge and D. Moellendorf (eds.), *Global Justice: Seminal Essays* (St. Paul: Paragon House, 2008) and K. Hutchings, "Global Justice", in C. Hay (ed.), *New Directions in Political Science: Responding to the Challenges of an Interdependent World* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), pp. 231-249.

[61] See Brown, "The Borders of (International) Political Theory". Moreover, see A. Linklater, *The Transformation of Political Community: Ethical Foundations of the Post-Westphalian Era* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1998); Linklater has argued that the idea of political community had by the end of the twentieth century been transformed, so that it was no longer the same as that that had been dominant since the Treaty of Westphalia (1648).

[62] Indeed, it would be impossible to refer to all the literature here. In addition to the literature on 'global ethics' and 'global justice' listed above, see, among others, A. Sen, *Poverty and Famines: An Essay on Entitlement and Deprivation* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981) and *Inequality Reexamined* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992); S. Caney and P. Jones, *Human Rights and Global Diversity* (London: Frank Cass: 2001); T. Pogge, *World Poverty and Human Rights* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2002 and 2008) and Pogge (ed.), *Freedom From Poverty as a Human Right*; T. Hayward, "Global Justice and the Distribution of Natural Resources", *Political Studies*, Vol. 54 No. 2 (2006), pp. 349-369; "Human Rights Versus Emissions Rights: Climate Justice and the Equitable Distribution of Ecological Space", *Ethics and International Affairs*, Vol. 21 No. 4 (2007), pp. 431-450; "On the Nature of

Another trend in political theory over the last two decades has been an increasing interest in 'identity' and 'identities'.[63] In consequence, debates about justice shifted from redistribution to recognition.[64]

As a result of the professionalization of political theory and the concern with academic boundaries, other forms of political reflection – exhibited, for example, in literature – have been underestimated. For instance, Homer's epic poetry,[65] Greek tragedy (Aeschylus, Euripides, Sophocles)[66] and comedy (Aristophanes) or the literary political fictions of

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Our Debt to the Global Poor", *Journal of Social Philosophy*, Vol. 39 No. 1 (2008), pp. 1-19 and "International Political Theory and the Global Environment: Some Critical Questions for Liberal Cosmopolitans", *Journal of Social Philosophy*, Vol. 40 No. 2 (2009), pp. 276-295; D. Moellendorf, *Global Inequality Matters* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009); J. S. Fishkin and R. E. Goodin (eds.), *Population and Political Theory* (Chistester and Malden, Mass.: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010); P. Gilbert, *Terrorism, Security and Nationality: An Introductory Study in Applied Political Philosophy* (London: Routledge, 1994) and *New Terror, New Wars* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press / Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2003).

[63] See W. Connolly, *Identity/Difference* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991) and J. Tully, "Identity Politics", in T. Ball and R. Bellamy (eds.), *The Cambridge History of Twentieth Century Political Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 517-533, among others.

[64] S. Benhabib, "From Redistribution to Recognition? The Paradigm Change in Contemporary Politics", in her *The Claims of Culture, Equality and Diversity in the Global Era* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), pp. 49-81; N. Fraser and A. Honneth (eds.), *Redistribution or Recognition? A Political-Philosophical Exchange* (London: Verso, 2003). For a criticism of the recognition theorists see L. McNay, *Against Recognition* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007). Although McNay is sympathetic with the insights of the recognition theorists, she argues that these insights are insufficiently embedded in a sociological understanding of power relations.

[65] On the political ideas in Homer's epic poetry see e.g. N. Janszen, "The Divine Comedy of Homer: Defining Political Virtue through Comic Depictions of the Gods", in L. G. Rubin (ed.), *Justice v. Law in Greek Political Thought* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 1997), pp. 69-81; P. J. Deneen, "The Odyssey of Political Theory", in *ibid.*, pp. 83-109; D. Dobbs, "Reckless Rationalism and Heroic Reverence in Homer's *Odyssey*", *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 81 (1987), pp. 491-508.

[66] See e.g. J. P Euben, *Greek Tragedy and Political Theory* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1986). For the place of tragedy in contemporary politics see Leca, "Political Philosophy in Political Science: Sixty Years On. Part II", p. 97. Leca argues that, despite the fact that "a significant part of contemporary political philosophy looks dedicated to keeping political tragedy at bay", actually there is much tragedy in the contemporary world. For instance, one of the tragedies

George Orwell and the novels of Antonis Samarakis, among others, are rich sources of political thinking. Although they cannot be classified as 'political theory', they are examples of 'political thought' and deserve the attention and analysis of political theorists and philosophers. For example, Orwell's *Animal Farm* criticizes Stalin and Stalinism, while his novel *1984* is a criticism of totalitarianism.[67] Importantly, the term "Big Brother" that Orwell uses in *1984* has become contemporary vernacular; in addition, the adjective "Orwellian" has come to mean totalitarian and manipulative, and to be associated with propagandistic practices and misinformation. Likewise, the novels of Samarakis are a cry for liberty and human dignity, an appeal against dehumanization and depersonalization. His themes were the vulnerability of individuals vis-à-vis state power, public corruption and the alienation of the individual in consumer society – themes which stroke a chord in the 1960s and 1970s.[68] His novel *The Flaw* (published in 1965) was prophetic of the military junta in Greece (1967-1974) – it extols individual freedom and criticizes the political violence of a totalitarian state;[69] while his short story entitled *The Passport* (published in 1973) is based on a personal experience during the Greek dictatorship, when he was denied a passport to travel abroad.[70] It seems that there is an ironic contradiction between the task of political theory and political philosophy – to wit, to deal with and analyze the problems of an epoch in a general way – and its professionalization which restricts its scope within disciplinary boundaries and "which submits its productions to the rules governing the academic achievement (overspecialization, methodological refinements, evolution toward progress) it is expected to criticize".[71]

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of our time is the 'globalization paradox', that is, the impossibility of coexistence of global markets, states and democracy. *Ibid*., p. 97.

[67] G. Orwell, *Animal Farm: A Fairy Story* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1945) and *1984* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1949), respectively.

[68] Αντώνη Σαμαράκη, *Ζητείται Ελπίς*, 34η έκδοση (Αθήνα: Ελευθερουδάκης, 1991) [Antonis Samarakis, *Hope Wanted* (1954)]; Αντώνη Σαμαράκη, *Σήμα Κινδύνου*, 20ή έκδοση (Αθήνα: Ελευθερουδάκης, 1989) [Antonis Samarakis, *Alarm Signal* (1959)]; Αντώνη Σαμαράκη, *Αρνοῦμαι*, 24η έκδοση (Αθήνα: Ελευθερουδάκης, 1990) [Antonis Samarakis, *I Refuse* (1961)].

[69] Αντώνη Σαμαράκη, *Το Λάθος*, 40ή έκδοση (Αθήνα: Ελευθερουδάκης,, 1990) [Antonis Samarakis, *The Flaw*].

[70] Αντώνης Σαμαράκης, *Το Διαβατήριο*, 19η έκδοση (Αθήνα: Ελευθερουδάκης,, 1990) [Antonis Samarakis, *The Passport*].

[71] Leca, "Political Philosophy in Political Science: Sixty Years On. Part II", p. 99.