Introduction: Methods in Normative Political Theory/Philosophy

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This special volume of Public Reason consists of the papers developed out of the delegates` presentations in two subsequent ECPR Summer School on Methods in Normative Political Theory/Philosophy at Keele University organized in 2014 and 2015. They reflect the diversities of the problems and the richness of the discussions concerning the methodologies in contemporary philosophy, as they were discussed deeply in the foregoing events. In other words, they well illustrate the multi-layered and multi-dimensional problems of the contemporary political theory.[1]

One fundamental debate in political theory is, of course, the one concerning what kind of normativity the political activity as such inheres. One can argue that the entire tradition of the political philosophy, starting from Plato, has rightfully presumed that politics is a normative activity and tried to figure out the nature of this normativity. Even Machiavelli, who raised his voice dismissively against the ancient tradition of political philosophy preceding him, was indeed not challenging the idea of politics as a normative activity, but the kind of moral normativity he thought mistakenly attributed to politics by others preceding him. Whether one likes it or not, the Machiavellian idea that politics has a normativity peculiar to its own would then be influential for the certain strands of western political thinking. These strands, which sometimes show themselves as radically left-wing (e.g. Marxist political theory) and sometimes radically right-wing (e.g. Carl Schmitt`s political theory), deserve to be called "political realisms" by virtue of the Machiavellian inheritance they have. Interestingly, however, a particular contemporary strand of political theorists from the Anglo-American world employ the realist conception of politics from a liberal standpoint. Bernard Williams, one of the most influential figures in the 20th century British Philosophy, stands also as a representative of this liberal school of political realism.

Clayton Chin's paper, "Challenging Political Theory: Pluralism and Method in the Work of Bernard Williams," is concerned with the appropriate approach to theorizing about politics and examines the methodology of Bernard Williams in this vein. Chin offers a new interpretation of Williams's political work extracting resources from it

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1] For a compact and systematic overview of the major problems in normative political theory, see Baiasu, Sorin. 2014. Normative Theory. In *The Encyclopedia of Political Thought*, edited by Michael T. Gibbons, Diana Coole, Elisabeth Ellis, Kennan Ferguson, pp. 2576-85. London: John Wiley & Sons.

that can be used to provide a significant challenge to "contemporary political thought's treatment of method and pluralism." Prior readings of Williams have emphasized his conceptual approach and his attempt to ground politics in stability, and Chin criticizes these ideas for over emphasizing stability to the exclusion of other elements. Chin reads Williams in the light of his work on Historicism and Naturalism the result of which is a mode of socio-political criticism of our present political practices and ideas which enables a thorough democratic pluralism.

While Chin draws on a strand of political theory that advocates for a specific form of normativity for political practice, Avigail Ferdman, in her article "From Inevitable Establishment to Mutual Exclusion: The Challenge of Liberal Neutrality", can be argued to be going through the reverse direction towards a robustly ethical normativity for politics. She revisits the debate between liberal neutrality and perfectionism, which is indeed a debate about the possibility of drawing a distinction between ethical normativity and political normativity, with the intention of showing certain limitations of liberal neutrality.

As Avigail elaborates in her paper, the principle of liberal neutrality requires that the state not take a stand on matters of conceptions of the good life, and therefore no conception of the good is to be endorsed by the state based on its intrinsic value. The Principle is supported by some because failure of the state to observe it results in privileging the norms and values of select groups and ultimately in failing to treat all groups with respect. She draws a distinction between domains in which the principle might be thought applicable, namely, between domains in which rival options can coexist with one another and domains in which such options are mutually exclusive. She then argues that neutrality is plausible with respect to the former but "heavily restricted" with respect to the latter. This entails, she argues, that even if neutrality is morally required, it is conceptually impossible in mutually exclusive domains. That is, it is conceptually impossible for the state not to endorse some particular conception of the good when dealing with domains in which the options are mutually exclusive. She argues this by considering one kind of coexisting domain and one mutually exclusive domain – language regulation and spatial organization. Taking for-granted that language-regulation is compatible with neutrality, Avigail argues that spatial organization is different in ways that prevent the principle of liberal neutrality from being observed.

It is clear that in pointing out the limits of liberal neutrality regarding, at least, certain domains, Avigail`s argument has an impact that has to do with the communitarian critique of liberalism. Communitarian critique, which has come to the fore towards the end of the 20th century, raised against liberal thought the objection that it has a shallow and shaky ground for normativity. For the communitarians, not only the liberal understanding of political institutions and processes is deficient; but also liberalism cannot account for peoples` deep commitments which make life meaningful for them. A recurrent theme in this critique is the "cold," even "inhumane," moral rationalism attributed to such founding figures of liberal philosophy as Immanuel Kant, who are alleged to recognize

no importance for feelings and emotions, which make us authentic beings. In this regard, Christopher Murphy`s article "What might Scheler say to Rawls?" conducts an important discussion, for it seeks for an accommodation between Rawls`s Kantian liberalism and the communitarian sensitivities concerning emotional attachments and commitments of human beings.

Murphy`s work deploys Scheler's concept of the person both for a communitarian critique of Rawls and as a way to strengthen his philosophy by addressing a minor flaw in its foundation. We thus consider, what Scheler might have said to Rawls. Murphy ascribes to Rawls an analysis of the ordinary concept of a person – which Rawls says is devoid of metaphysical baggage. The analysis which Murphy gives to Rawls is one on which a person is "first and foremost a rational agent as opposed to an emotive agent". To this, Scheler would have argued that Rawls`s picture of the person is simply inaccurate, and Murphy argues that there are two ways in which this Schelerian insight might interact with Rawls`s philosophy. On the first, essentially negative, development of the issue, Scheler's insights can be used to straightforwardly criticize Rawlsian philosophy for presupposing a conception of the person devoid of all of its emotive aspects. Murphy favours a second means of understanding Scheler's insights: using Scheler's more accurate conception of the person to plug holes in the Rawlsian philosophy. This involves replacing Rawls's conception of the person with Scheler's own whilst retaining the bulk of Rawls's political theory in order to accommodate the criticisms of Rawls mentioned above.

As Murphy ponders on the possibility of a stronger relation between political theory and metaphysics, there is also the question of how political theory should be related to empirical sciences. Even though one might think that political theory concerns primarily principles and ideals which cannot be grounded on empirical facts, one might still contend that political theory should take into consideration empirical facts at the level of application. Otherwise, what the philosopher produces at the abstract level of pure theoretical construction would be mere contemplation in the Ivory Tower, which is not capable of providing orientation and guidance in the practical world. Luca Costa`s "Context Dependence in Gaus's Evolutionary Account of Public" inquires for the possibility of a better use of empirical facts in normative political theory.

The paper by Luca Costa discusses Gaus' evolutionary account of public reason. Gaus has argued that individuals have a tendency to cooperate when enough others are already cooperating and to punish those who transgress social rules. Costa discusses the empirical support available for Gaus's thesis in several sections. The first aims to explain how it is that cooperating with others even when this means accepting rules not really in one's own interest can possibly be supportive of one's own ends. An individual who unconditionally adheres to social rules and punishes those who do not, even at a cost to themselves is dubbed a Rule-Following Punisher, and the explanation of the first section depends on the assumption that a sufficient number of us are in fact Rule-Following Punishers. In the second section, therefore, Costa begins to discuss the empirical studies conducted with the aim of testing this hypothesis. A brief sketch of each study and its

conclusions is provided in the second section, before Costa moves on to discussing their methodological soundness in the third and fourth wherein the main criticisms are developments of (a) the claim that the studies use unrepresentative sample populations to make generalizations about the human race, and (b) that the experiments conducted artificially isolate people from social factors which might otherwise have made a significant difference to the results. Despite these flaws, Costa concludes that Gaus's thesis has decent empirical support and that since any normative political theory begins with assumptions about what humans are like, future normative theory can and should take note of Gaus's thesis.

As Costa`s paper indicates that political theory should be a kind of endeavour producing insights applicable to the existing social-political structures, there are debates concerning what fundamental normative orientation the political theory should have vis-à-vis existing social and political structures. One could say that on the one hand, many modern and contemporary strands of political theory, e.g., the Frankfurt School, share the conviction that the social-political theory should have a critical (progressivist or emancipatory) orientation towards the existing structures, which more or less reflect historical-cultural asymmetries produced by unjustified power inequalities, and thus forms of explicit or implicit subordinations and discriminations. On the other hand, however, there are also the strands of political theory, e.g., certain conservative variants of communitarianism, which seem to take the elaboration and justification of an authentic and integral way of life in a particular society as the main orientation of political-theoretical-activity. Boaz Ahad Ha`am`s "Deaf in Need of Ideology," which questions the prevalent mind-sets and institutional structures producing explicit and implicit forms of injustice against deaf people in our contemporary societies, clearly follows the conception of political theory with an orientation to social-political emancipation.

Ahad Ha'am argues that deafness is not a disability. His argument has both a positive and a negative component. In the negative part, Ahad Ha'am explicates two arguments widely presupposed in the popular view that deafness is a disability. The first argument is one which claims that deafness is 'unnatural' for human beings and thus in need of medical treatment, or 'curing'. The second argument claims that deafness, regardless of whether it is natural or not, stops a person from properly integrating into society because it stops them from communicating effectively with people with hearing, and this puts them at a great social and practical disadvantage – it is a social disability. The arguments are related in important ways and Ahad Ha'am traces the relationship and offers a powerful critique of both. The positive stand of Ahad Ha'am's case appeals to 'the experience of deafness as an intimate existential condition utilizing sign-language' – an experience shared by many deaf people. He uses this to illustrate that people who are deaf are neither 'unnatural' nor social crippled by their deafness; they are doing perfectly well without being 'cured'. He concludes that despite all of this, the view that deafness is not a disability continues to be a minority one because it lacks 'a coherent set of ideas that provide political justification' or an 'ideology'.

In the final paper, Marie Newhouse reconsiders the debate between Rawls and Libertarianism in a novel way. She focuses on Rawls's much debated contention concerning the arbitrariness of the distribution of natural attributes within the political-society. On the one hand, this contention seems to ground Rawls's famous "difference principle," and thus his egalitarian liberalism. On the other hand, Newhouse argues, Rawls contention is usually misunderstood by Libertarians, as they seem to suppose that Rawls's claim is simply about a person's relationship to her own attributes. In her view, this is mistaken. Rawls does not mean that a person's relationship to her own attributes is morally arbitrary, but that social distribution of position within a society in accordance with natural assets is arbitrary. Having defended Rawls at the point he was targeted by Libertarians, Newhouse suggests that her reading has, at least, one important implication which makes visible the arbitrariness of Rawls' preference for a system of democratic equality over a system of liberal equality. Employing insights from the debates on "human capital externality" in economics, she contends that risk-averse individuals, namely maxi-minimalist rational actors in Rawls' original condition, would opt for a system of liberal equality consisted in distribution in accordance with market processes, rather than a system of democratic equality based on the difference principle. There is, yet, a proviso Newhouse emphasizes. It is that the risk-averse rational individuals would also opt for a social safety net which will function to safeguard social bases of self-respect. We would like to note that Newhouse's paper is not only thought-provoking as an argument on Rawls' theory, but also it illustrates well that methodologically relevant questions of accurate and fully-fledged elaboration of decision-deliberation models are as important as substantive premises concerning human beings and rationality in political philosophy.

All in all, we think, the reader of this special issue will find a glimpse of major methodological concerns in contemporary political theory provided by young and promising political theorists. We would like to end by thanking to European Consortium of Political Science (ECPR), ECPR Kantian Political Theory Standing Group, ECPR Political Theory Standing Group, Keele-Oxford-St Andrews Kantian Research Centre (KOSAK), which all contributed to the organization of the summer school events in the first place and thus to the coming out of the works in this volume.

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