


The foundation of political science: Historical questions about its emergence and consolidation

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ABSTRACT

What will be tried to be explained in this article is the path taken by political science, from its emergence to contemporaneity. What is sought to be apprehended is then the path of formation of a Discipline, or of a branch of study that is practiced all over the world. One cannot leave aside its origins, which come from philosophy, through sociology, more specifically political sociology, until we reach the contemporary world and the consolidation of this area of study as a discipline taught in the most diverse universities around the globe.

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INTRODUCTION

What will be tried to be explained in this article is the path taken by political science, from its emergence to contemporaneity. What is sought to be apprehended is then the path of formation of a Discipline, or of a branch of study that is practiced all over the world. One cannot leave aside its origins, which come from philosophy, through sociology, more specifically political sociology, until we reach the contemporary world and the consolidation of this area of study as a discipline taught in the most diverse universities around the globe.

It is therefore necessary to understand what is the statute that determines today what we call "political science", we could ask what its content and method would be, if we are talking about "science" in the canons of modern science. To what extent are philosophical precepts still present in political science, and to what extent are they something negative or positive in their influence?

Throughout this essay, we will try to resolve some of these questions, even if not always exhaustively, and to explain the main paths taken by this science until it was constituted as such. Whenever possible, it will also seek to outline its methodology and its object of study, so that the main characteristics of this "science" that apparently took so long to gain independence from the others can be clarified.

According to Schwartzberg's text (Schwartzberg, 1979, 61-66), the so-called "political sociology" had existed for a long time, well before the emergence of sociology understood as a science properly so-called, as it was inaugurated by Auguste Comte. Sociology, in its emergence, had acquired the status of a science that proposed to understand society, that is, it aimed to seek to understand social phenomena.

But as Schwartzberg himself points out, one can already speak of a "political sociology" well before Comte. Of course, it did not exist properly under that name, but it was already based on the thought of several authors. Many will agree that there were two main precursors of what can be called political science today, they are: Aristotle and Machiavelli.

On Aristotle's contribution I quote Schwartzberg:

"His philosophical reflection, in fact, is based on the examination of effective behavior and social reality, based on concrete, very varied and very extensive research, conducted in a spirit of scientific observation." (Schwartzberg, 1979, p. 12).

Let us observe that before Aristotle there were other thinkers of politics, among whom Plato stands out, but none of them achieved an approach as systematized as the Aristotelian one, since he employed a comparative and inductive method, which we could already consider as a genesis of the method of political science. Aristotle is not exactly doing political philosophy by using a comparative method, for example when he studies the various Greek and foreign constitutions of his time, but rather a kind of political science.



Since we are talking about political science and political philosophy, a small comment on these two terms is necessary. The big question is: how is political philosophy different from political science? At first glance it seems to us that the first is much more located in the field of ideas, that is, political philosophy or philosophy of politics works with a "ought to be" of phenomena. On the other hand, what can be considered political science is more related to political reality as it is, as it presents itself empirically to the scientist.

Politics, in order to achieve a scientific character, tries to gain objectivity by creating a language appropriate to the phenomena it examines, it would be a language free of values, "sterilized", factual. But would this be possible? The possibility of abstaining from one's personal values (as Durkheim wanted) is something very complex. It does not follow from this that one cannot speak of a political science, nor that there is no possibility of rational knowledge in such an area, and that political philosophy is something inseparable from political science.

On the contrary, there is a huge field to be explored by political science, the most generic definition of which is found in Bobbio's Dictionary of Politics:

"The expression Political Science can be used in a broad and non-technical sense to indicate any study of political phenomena and structures, conducted systematically and rigorously, supported by a broad and careful examination of the facts exposed with rational arguments." (Bobbio, 2000).

It can be said that there is an independence of this science from philosophy, even though it cannot ignore its roots. From this, and already closing the reasoning about the difference between the terms political philosophy and political science, let us return to their historical origin.

After Aristotle there were also those who made their contribution to political thought, but only after a long time, already in Modernity, is the true creator of political science located.

It was Machiavelli who inaugurated the thought that we can consider as the precursor of political science. He did this because he was the first thinker who brought politics "from heaven to earth", that is, Machiavelli sought in his writings, notably in *the Prince*, to show politics as it is, to detach it from metaphysical values and based on Christian ethics. He promoted the separation between politics and ethics.

Machiavelli sought in his thought to break with traditional political thought, which had lasted since Aristotle. He sought to establish that the world of politics belonged to a cruel, cunning, contradictory, chaotic empirical reality, very different from what was previously preached. He then separates two worlds (don't understand two metaphysical worlds!), the world of everyday life that is governed by Christian values and customs, based on ethics and golden rules, and the other, that of politics, governed by a framework of values completely different from the first.



In the world of politics, the Prince must make use of cunning, dissimulation, use the imagination of the people, to benefit himself. Machiavelli tries to show the actual truth of things, what they really are, and not what they should be. And the real world of politics is this, practically devoid of moral values. Thus, he inaugurates a thought that can be considered "scientific" of politics, by examining its empirical, factual reality, leaving aside a philosophical interpretation of "ought to be".

Other thinkers are also of paramount importance in the construction and consolidation of politics as science, especially Montesquieu and Tocqueville. Both authors of very important works, which were based on enormous empirical studies, but which were still more on the plane of political philosophy than on political science.

Over the years, and already taking a leap to the contemporary world, we have the enormous contribution of Marx, who was more concerned with understanding the capitalist world in which we lived, thus providing important categories of analysis of social reality for a large part of social scientists.

The Marxist method, called "Dialectical Historical Materialism" seeks to study social reality from the historical development of the productive forces, that is, to understand such a society it is necessary to study how it produced and produces its material life. Thus, on a material infrastructure, for Marx, an ideological superstructure rises, which is dependent on the former.

Even Marxist thought still finds itself in a certain way with one foot in philosophy, or perhaps both feet. But, then, you could ask, after all, when did political science appear? The answer is that this emergence was gradual, historical, and that it occurred together with the emergence of the social sciences, with the so-called political sociology.

But a cut can be made, and thus determine a rupture between political science and the other human sciences, insofar as it has a determined method and an object of study. In this regard, we refer once again to Schwartzberg's text, in which he points to political science itself as something of the twentieth century, when it then enjoys a certain autonomy in relation to general sociology.

This branch of study was consolidated mainly between the years 1890 and 1914 when numerous American universities created political science departments, and was further solidified in 1903 with the foundation of the APSA (American Political Science Association). According to Schwartzberg, early political scientists were concerned with improving existing institutions, directing political studies toward practical political action. It was first necessary to observe and know the facts, breaking with the antecedent tendency of philosophy and theories that preached what should be instead of describing what is.

This first focus of thought of political scientists clearly reflects an institutionalist approach, in which researchers sought to understand the American people and their institutions as they are. After



these first studies, there was an overcoming of this institutional approach, giving rise to the concept of "*political processus*" that sought to encompass the interaction of public institutions with social groups.

This type of approach that sought to capture the social process, made room for a school based on people's political behavior, the so-called "behaviorism". Schwartzberg considers that "reacting against conventional political science, against the institutional approach, it is a matter of formulating political problems in terms of observed and observable behavior" (Schwartzberg, 1979, p.24).

The main aspect defended by this school concerned the scientific method. The inaugurators of this thought, especially Charles Merriam, said that political thought should be definitively replaced by developing scientific techniques. Behaviorists seek in any way to systematically observe people's behavior, looking for regularities and uniformities that could be studied scientifically and that could provide models for future elaboration of theories.

Despite this number of variants, even those that succeeded the behaviorist school, with its criticisms of this model and new ways of looking at the study of political reality, it is possible to conclude from what has already been seen that political science is based on the study of power. It is a "science of power", and because it has such a character, it often ends up distinguishing between the rulers and the ruled and understanding the phenomenon of authority.

Swartzberg argues that:

"In summary, political sociology (let us understand political science here) is the branch of the social sciences that studies the phenomena of power, understanding that the most evident manifestations of power are produced in the state framework, but that similar manifestations are also produced in restricted frameworks". (Schwartzberg, 1979, p.53).

Thus, politics has as its most specific object the relations of power, relations that are most often institutionalized in the figure of the State. Perhaps for this reason there is a very great interdependence between the first studies in the area with the state question and consequently with the question of the elites.

The theory of elites is in this context an important branch of political science thought, as it constitutes in a certain way the basis of such thinking and its emergence. In Alan Zuckerman's text (Zuckerman, 1982), there is a discussion regarding this regard, in which the author examines two of the greatest exponents in this regard, Mosca and Pareto.

Zuckerman seeks a sample of the various interpretations on the subject, which have already been suggested by other authors such as Lasswell, Wright Mills and Robert Dahl. But he comes to the conclusion that he will develop the question of elites from a perspective that considers "the domination of the elite as the collective manipulation of the masses by a small leading group or several of these groups" (Zuckerman, 1982, p. 8). It starts from the assumption "that all the members



who make up an elite are aware of their group interests" and that this awareness "is provided by an implicit or explicit sense of class or group solidarity", and that it manifests itself "through a common will aimed at action." (Zuckerman, 1982, p. 8).

This author understands and shares Mosca's concept of political class, which refers to all groups that exercise power or influence and are directly engaged in the political struggle. Among this political class, the author narrows his conceptualization by distinguishing a smaller group, the group of the political elite, these are the individuals who really exercise political power in a society in a given space of time.

Without dwelling any longer on this issue of the elitist approach to politics, the important thing is that the content of this type of approach is clear, almost in its institutional exclusivity. This analysis strictly takes into account the small number of people who at first glance hold the power of decision-making in society. It is an institutionalist approach, and one that ends up impregnating political science a lot.

This type of approach, which gave great importance to the State and its institutions, ended up providing an object for political science. Thus, we can speak of politics as a science, as a science that investigates mainly the relations of the State with society. This meaning has expanded, and we can speak today of a political science that studies power relations and conflicts in society.

At the end of Schwartzberg's text, he points out some main branches of science that are consolidated in the twentieth century, according to the author, it is still a pragmatic classification, but it meets the needs of the formation of the curriculum of a political scientist. There are four broader areas that are subdivided. The first is that of political theory, divided into political theory and the history of ideas, the second is that of political institutions, which is divided into: the constitution, the central government, the regional and local governments, the public administration, the economic and social functions of the government and the comparative political institutions.

The third part is that of parties, groups and public opinion, which are separated into: political parties, groups and associations, citizen participation in government and administration, and public opinion. And finally the fourth part, international relations, which contains international politics, international politics and organization, and international law. (Schwartzberg, 1979, p.54)

This is one of the existing subdivisions, however several others can be found. This is believed to be an important classification in a summarized explanation of the main themes of political science. Finally, it would be important to highlight that political science managed to develop and assert itself as a science, especially in the twentieth century, with a profound influence of North American schools.

Due to its genesis in the American school, political science was also the target of much criticism and questioning. These derived in large part from the influence, direct or indirect, that the



American government had in the financing and direction of the research carried out. Many of the studies carried out can be called into question, with respect to their intent and possible imperialist interests, especially with regard to international relations and the reproduction of forms of world domination by US power.

On this subject, Chilcote's text (Chilcote, 1998, chap 2) stands out, in which the author states that ideology is relevant to politics, and that "political scientists tend to be ideological in that their values are linked to property, money, and influence – a reflection of the capitalist world around them." (Chilcote, 1998, p. 70).

This same author draws attention to the fact that the understanding of ideologies ended up causing a reevaluation of political science. This reassessment lies in the fact that the capacity of political science to challenge the current power structure must be questioned in order to promote an ethics in academia and teaching, which enable a radical, and not biased, understanding of reality.

Towards the end of this reflection, it is worth making a general overview of the path taken so far. First, the genesis of political science, in its philosophical origins, was discussed. The main authors who contributed to the foundation of what we can currently call political science stand out. Among them, Aristotle and Machiavelli are essential and primordial figures.

Machiavellian thought is considered essential in the rupture of political philosophy, thus establishing an important distinction between the "ought to be" of politics and what it is in empirical reality. Other political philosophers who contributed to the advancement of politics in its scientific path were also cited, such as Montesquieu, Tocqueville and Marx, the latter of whom provided important categories of study for social scientists.

Then it was emphasized that there is the possibility of talking about a political science, separate from philosophy and sociology. It is understood that the period of birth of this science was long, but its genesis as we understand it today took place mainly in North American universities, with the first approaches based on institutionalism, that is, on an analysis that sought to understand political phenomena from the study of the country's institutions.

As a response to this model, the so-called behaviorist or behaviorist studies emerged, which sought to apprehend social reality from political behaviors, trying to give them a scientific status, and that used rigorous methods of understanding empirical reality.

Finally, the constitution and focus of political science were also examined, in its essence, which falls on the study of the power relations of societies, particularly with regard to the state sphere. And then, at the end of the work, the criticism contained in Chilcote's text was explained, which raises the question of the legitimacy of the knowledge produced by political scientists linked to US imperialist interests.



Thus, to conclude, the complexity of the topic is highlighted, and it is hoped that this text has contributed in some way to a clarification on such a broad subject. It is a fact that political science was constituted as such only in the twentieth century, but it had its origins long ago in the so-called political philosophers.

Of course, in order to gain the scientific status as it is understood from modernity, it had to find a method and a set of defined objects, and this happened gradually. The so-called immunity and scientific impartiality are not relevant, because it is known that it has its degree of influence, however, even so, this is not a reason to prevent the construction of objective and rigorous political knowledge, which can be shared by the scientific community and serve in some way for the improvement of human societies.



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