

Editorial

## Judging Politics – A Temporal Perspective

The discussion of political judgement commonly includes it as a special case of more general figures of judgement. This is also the case with most of the contributions in this volume, taking the work of Hannah Arendt as a point of departure. Still, 'judgement' in the case of Arendt was a name for a certain type of activity of judging itself: the planned title of the third volume of the *Life of the Mind* was Judging.

I want, however, to hint at another perspective, perhaps worth being developed more closely some day. While the tradition from the Aristotelian *phronesis* to Arendt takes judgement as the noun and the political as its qualification, my aim is to revert the tables. I want to draw distinctions within politics as activity itself, constituted by the criterion of playing with the contingency in the situation (cf. Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment*).

The English adjective 'political' refers – in the 20th century usage – to three different nouns: politics, policy and polity. I have introduced a further nuance against the

background of the history of the concept, namely, dividing politics into two verbal figures of politicization and politicking. In my nominalistic view, understanding politics as activity, as a *Bewegungsbegriff* in the Koselleckian sense, the primary ‘performative’ operations are simply politicization and politicking. Politicization refers to the marking of a *Spielraum* of contingency and politicking to performances within this *Spielraum*. Polity is a limiting case which demarcates that which is ‘confirmed’ as a commonly accepted *Spielraum* of politicking in a situation, while policy refers to regulated forms or ‘lines’ of politicking of any agent engaged in politics. This reading turns politics into a verbalized and temporalized phenomenon (cf. my Introduction in Kari Palonen & Tuija Parvikko (eds.): *Reading the Political*, Helsinki: The Finnish Political Science Association, 1993).

‘Decentering’ politics into these four aspects – politicization, politicking, polity and policy – allows us to understand that politics may be manifested in thematically different yet related styles of activity. They can, at least potentially, also be turned against each other. My point is to argue that this pluralization of politics also invites us to a corresponding differentiation in the activity of judging politically.

Playing with the contingency of the situation as the constitutive criterion of politics means, in an important sense, playing with time. The possibility of analyzing political judgements in temporal terms can be related to the three classical dimensions of time: judging has an inherent relation to present, past and future. Reinhart Koselleck has – especially in the article “Begriffsgeschichtliche Anmerkungen zur Zeitgeschichte” (in Victor Conzenius & Martin Greschat & Hermann Kocher (eds.): *Die Zeit nach 1945 als Thema kirchlicher Zeitgeschichte*, 17-31. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1988) – proposed that each of them, in turn, has their own present, past and

future. Thus, he extends the matrix of historical time into a field of nine types of temporal experience.

My suggestion is, furthermore, to distinguish political time from historical time. The initial point lies in the understanding that, whereas historical time is, in principle, unlimited in its relations to the past and future, political time is limited in both respects. Following Gisela Riescher (*Zeit und Politik*, Baden-Baden: Nomos, 1994) we can take the electoral term as a representative anecdote illustrating the temporal limits of political activity and the limited character of political time.

In sum, we get the following rough ‘time-table’ of political judgements:

### **Time-table of Political Judgements**

<b>past future</b> polity 1	<b>present future</b> politicization 2	<b>future future</b> politics fiction
<b>past present</b> policy 1	<b>present present</b> politicking	<b>future present</b> policy 2
<b>past past</b> ‘prehistory’	<b>present past</b> politicization 1	<b>future past</b> polity 2

In explicating the table, the first point concerns the borderlines of politics. Both past past and future future can be located beyond the political experience of time. Because of this, I want to name name them ‘prehistory’ and ‘politics fiction’ respectively. How these temporal experiences are presented, may be politically relevant in a wider sense, but it has no direct significance for the present political situation. Any change in the situation may move aspects of these temporal experiences into one of the significant modes of political time.

On the other hand politicking as performance in the present is not just momentary or limited to special occasions. It can, rather, refer to a kind of extended 'present present': Riescher's point is to insist on the electoral term as a contemporary paradigm for this sort of extended present. We can thus locate the performative action of politicking, in the sense of the apt Arendtian metaphor of politics as performing art (cf. *Between Past and Future*) in the center of the political timetable. The point is that it is not just a passing moment but a temporal conduct within the limits of an extended present, such as the current electoral term. It is just this extension of the present which makes it possible to us to include the self-assessment of the performance by political actors to political judgements.

Using Max Weber's idea in *Politik als Beruf*, we can rename citizens as 'occasional politicians'. This idea helps us to relativize the Arendtian distinction between actors and spectators in the judgement of political performance. Even those who only assess a politician's performance on TV are in this sense 'occasional politicians' who are involved in political judgement.

All of the other aspects of political action in this timetable are divided into two variants, the past- and future-oriented. The first one indicates – in Koselleckian terms (cf. *Vergangene Zukunft*) – the space of experience, the second one the horizon of expectation of present politics.

My typology then helps us understand that the most important aspect in judging politically concerns politicization, understood nominalistically as any move opening specific dimensions of contingency to the play of politicking. The present politicking takes place within a definite horizon of the possible, of *Chancen* in the Weberian sense: without judging this horizon of politicization(s), the present performance is not intelligible. Neither can the present performance be assessed entirely without a perspective

of the future: it refers to new and vanishing *Chancen* already indicated by the present performance in politicking. To make this sort of judgements is difficult for the performing professional politicians, for they presuppose a distance from the present performance which is available only to analyzing spectators. Still, it is impossible to imagine any self-judgement of one's activity by a performing politician without the presence of a certain horizon of *Chancen*, both past and future. The spectator-analyst of political performance should always cast attention to these often tacit dimensions in the self-understanding of present political actors.

While politicization refers to the opening moves of playing with contingency, polity in my formal, nominalistic interpretation is a limit-figure which refers to the moves of confirming some existing types of politicization. These moves both exclude and delimit the use of some available forms of politicization and create an obstacle for the possibility of new *Chancen* of politicization becoming commonly acceptable. Politicking as performance should not only be related to those politicizations which are open in principle, but also to the commonly accepted and regimented forms of the polity. The past and future aspects of the polity can then be understood as analogous to those of the broader *Spielraum* of politicization. Political judgement thus concerns both the borderline between polity-conform and non-conform forms of politicization as well as the utilizing (past) and indicating (future) aspects of politicking in relation to both of these forms of politicization. Judgements of this sort are probably highly difficult for the performing actors, while they may be all too ready to accept the limits of polity as the limits of politicking in general.

Politicking as performance should be related to the regulated forms of politicking contained in policies, as plans, programmes or 'lines'. As compared with past

policies, politicking is characterized by a sort of transcendence-in-action in several respects. It consciously deviates from the line-conform type of action in some respects and legitimates this both by the distance from the present to the moment of the fixation of the policy and by the insight of the special temporal occasions involved in the ongoing extended present. On the other hand, the transcending aspect of the performance cannot last forever, but is likely to produce new fixations. The future policy dimension thematizes the ‘outcomes’ of politicking by turning them into subjects of choices between alternative policies. When policy-judgements are always related to politicking as performance, there is no point in trying to make politicking as policy-conforming as possible, or to end the unpredictable performance in politicking as soon as possible. In this sense policy-judgements cannot be pure spectator judgements but are related to self-judgements in the differentiation between policy and politicking among acting politicians.

Finally, a historical point. According to Koselleck’s thesis from the seventies, the horizon of expectation has grown more important than the space of experience. This has been the case roughly since the French Revolution. As I already indicated in the *Finnish Yearbook of Political Thought* vol. 1, Koselleck has later relativized this thesis, especially by insisting on the role of *Umschreibung* in history (cf. “Erfahrungswandel und Methodenwechsel”, published in Christian Meier & Jörn Rüsen (eds.): *Die historische Methode*, München: DTV, 1988). Although, for Koselleck this remains mainly a question of historiography, my thesis is that now – roughly speaking at least since the ‘Revolutions’ around 1989 – the situation has been changed.

For politicking, as present performance, the past politicizations, politics and policies are, today, more important than the perspectives on the future. I think this is the case for the simple reason that we can make quite definite and

contestable judgements on the past aspects, while for the future, the judgements necessarily remain vague. The present past, as a space of experience for the political action in the present present, today contains more radical political potentials for change than the assessments of the future. Just the illusion on the fixity of the past dramatizes its re-interpretations and deconstructs such constructs of history, which are taken as ‘reliable’ conditions for acting in the present. On the other hand, the reliance on specific trends and prognoses and long-term plans based on them has vanished, and nobody wonders if fixed expectations on the future will no longer keep. This shift from the present future to present past can be seen as a result of increasing insight into the contingency of history and the realization that contingency can also be used as a resource in politics. (Cf. my *Das Webersche Moment*, Wiesbaden: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1998).

All this also means an increasing significance of temporal judgements as inherent parts of political action. ‘Playing with time’ no longer only means only playing against the corrosive elements of time but playing with temporal categories and distinctions as operative elements in both political action and political analysis.

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