

## Political Problem: Natural or Conventional?

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### ***Abstract***

*In the following article we are going to discuss the phenomenon of political Problem (Or Problems). It is an attempt of philosophical and psychological interpretation of political thinking. Firstly the concept of political thinking and its relation to the identity issue will be examined. The aim is to determine the core principles of these two concepts and the relations between them. We will try to show the psychological means of formation of political thinking linking them with the issue of identity crisis. Basically two dimensions of human mentality will be discussed: psychological and social. Another purpose is to define the interaction between concepts of identity and rights and factors which make that correlation possible. We will also examine the two subcategories of the concept of rights- Natural and Conventional ones.*

**Keywords:** *Political thinking; Identity; Mental activity; Political problem; Identity crisis; Natural and Conventional Rights.*

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In the beginning we will try to define and explain what the phenomenon of political thinking means. The attitude of human mind towards the objective reality has a dualistic character which means that for the human consciousness external objects and events are turned into passive things which are divided into artificially created dichotomies and separable categories. Through such kind of separation from external world individuals and objective reality outside their personal existence become dissociated from each other and accordingly, the relation between subject and object is set. Such type of dualistic correlation between subject and object needs a general rule which would be able to regulate their interactions and find common point in fulfilling their needs. Here political thinking appears as a very means of regulator of those interactions. “Political way of thinking evidently has an intentional structure which means that it always strives for going beyond itself in order to come across with something alien from its subjective essence.” (Dolidze, 2007) Logically, the phenomenon of “otherness” occurs as a manifestation of “something alien from its subjective essence.” Hence the idea of “otherness” has appeared individuals need other persons to establish, actualize and justify their own existence. Accordingly, this kind of mental separation which takes a form of political thinking is a means of individual self-establishment. As introduced above political thinking is an intentional cognitive act based on conventional categories. Political person interprets external objects and events on the basis of social conventions and thus is acting according to them. To put it differently: individuals assign particular object or event to the artificially created conventional category. While doing so, individuals create a deterministic approach to external world. This statement is directly related with a subjective nature of political thinking. In other words- the political truth is indifferent to the actual situation but it expresses the thoughts and intentions of an individual. Taking these facts into account we can assume that the actual political problem is the direction of subjective mental distinctions and categories of one particular individual or group of individuals towards other groups or individuals whose intentions, as well as perceptions are entirely subjective too. The following level of development of political thinking is a creation of purely evaluative distinctions like good-not good. When a subject is categorized according to the artificially created concept there remain

characteristics and features neglected and this is why such kind of categorization is always partial. Therefore the way that human mind divides external objects and events are the source and reflection of social conventions. This does not refer to the political thinking only but to the ordinary personal attitudes and perceptions as well. At that point individuals develop stereotyped images towards other persons and various situations that occur with objective reality. That kind of strict separation of individual self-being from the external world finally leads to the specific condition of human mind which often tends to end up with conflict. We explored that subjectivity is the typical characteristics of political thinking but the issue does not seem that simple. Indeed, political way of thinking as a mental process is shaped by external factors. Basically, objective factors are: needs, ways of their satisfaction and preservation of life. The point is how different individuals or groups interpret and approach them. What we try here is to discourse on political way of thinking as of a manifestation of subjective character.

For better understanding the formation of divisible psychological process we can bring the ordinary conversational phrases and sentences expressing mental alienation having place inside the human mind as an example: “I create myself”, “It helps me to be in harmony with myself”, “I find myself”, “I allow myself”, “I control myself”...it is not difficult to see that there are two actual subjects in co-relation with each other in these phrases: “I” and “myself”. It may seem paradoxical but in this case “I” and “myself” are two different things. It appears as the distance between self from its reflection. The question to this paradox can be formulated in such a way: is the relation between these two parts (I and myself) objective or the fictional one? Thus, such kind of separation of the subject within itself is the main problem in the process of alienation. That means the division of human mind as a one whole in two parts. To put it differently, Political thinking is a means of self-control and self-regulation between “I” and “me”. “Here the thinking creates an alien, different object within itself and eventually the sameness of the subjective self turns into the sense of otherness.” (Dolidze, 2007) Mainly: the human mind is in contradiction and in conflict within itself as it tries to solve the self-inflicted problem. Here we refer to Hegel's “Subjective Spirit”, mainly, to the Self-Consciousness chapter where the division between consciousness and self-

consciousness is being made: “The truth of consciousness is self-consciousness, and the latter is the ground of the former, all consciousness of another object being as a matter of fact also self-consciousness. The expression of this is I=I.” (Hegel, 1817) Again, one more paragraph showing the mental separation given in our example from the same work: “Self-consciousness in its immediacy is a singularity and a desire: the contradiction, implied in its abstraction, which should be objective, or in its immediacy, which should be subjective. As against I = I, the concept is in itself the idea, the unity of itself and its reality.— Its immediacy, which is determined to be suspended, has at the same time the shape of an external object, which determines that self-consciousness is consciousness. But, for the self-certainty arising from the suspension of consciousness, the object is determined as null in itself Self-consciousness, therefore, is in itself in the object, and in this way conforms with the drive. In the negation, as the proper activity of the self it becomes this identity for the self.” Comparing our example of the divisible psychological process given above with the Hegelian duality of I=I, can be formulated in the following way: I=Myself.

How paradoxically it may sound but Political thinking appears as a self-created problem but at the same time is directed to solving itself. Taking these facts into account, we can clearly see how complicated is the phenomenon of political thinking as a main reason of fractured identity (or the contrary: fractured identity is the reason for creation of political way of thinking). Steaming form this definition we can assume that just like the most of psychological problems are the distortions within the mind itself, similarly, the political problem is nothing else (but) than a self-created psychological puzzle. Within the context of political thinking as of a self-created mental distortion, theory of projection may be helpful in understanding this phenomenon. In a political rivalry individuals (or politicians) mostly project their mental distortions on others, thus, assigning their own problems to them. By its side, target individuals or groups develop defense mechanisms creating background for conflict to occur.

During discourse we will see that alienated mental processes are in direct relation with identity. To have a general idea about the identity issue it would be useful to give its definition: “identity is individuals or groups sense of self. It is a product of self-consciousness, that I or we posses

distinct qualities as an entity that differentiates me from you and us from them” (Huntington, 2005) The definition given here rises a logical question if a link can be made between the concepts of identity and mental alienation. The typical feature of identity formation process is the separation of ordinary qualities of the subject from itself and assigning specific characteristics to those. From that point qualities which are only components of the whole gain self-sufficient meaning and are placed in different ranks. Therefore, the separated consciousness is the reason of formation of fractured identity which by its side forms the identity crisis as such. In the post-modern theoretical frameworks the definition is made on ethnic, racial, gender grounds (Online dictionary of anthropology, 2008). We can also add indicators of religious, sexual, class and political affiliation. All these identities are parts of the whole human consciousness which are included in it already but through such kind of separation from its essence they become different and thus independent subjects-they are turned into “subjects within subject”. To have a clearer idea how all those conceptions influence the human consciousness we can bring a concrete example of an American individual who defines herself in such a way: “when I was 19, I moved to New York City. If you asked me to describe myself then, I would have told you I was a musician, a poet, an artist and on a somewhat political level, a woman, a lesbian and a Jew. Being an American wouldn't have made my list” (Huntington, 2005).

It is quite clear how complicated is a general approach of individuals to the identity issues in developed Western societies. In many cases they are even contradictory to each other. As we see in the example given above she regards herself “on a somewhat political level, (!) a woman, a lesbian and a Jew”...such kind of definitions of personality really seem frustrating as this is a result of total mix of identity concepts which lead to the identity crisis finally. Individuals with such mental attitudes may have serious problems in defying themselves as a whole person in interactions with others. In any case they will have identity problems for the personality they will select to be. There is such kind of problem in developing societies as well. For example: some Georgians consider themselves as Europeans while the other part thinks of themselves to have typical Asian features of identity. In this case the society is trying to solve the self-created problem. In reality Georgians are Caucasians with

European and Asian identity characteristics and features. As Kiknadze puts it: “A cultural type of Georgians is neither fully oriental nor fully western” (Kiknadze, 2006). It is obvious that this is a typical case of identity crisis which we have elaborated above. In other words, the identity crisis is a separation of human consciousness into different personalities.

Here we tried to discuss two dimensions of the issue, psychological and social ones as they cross and mutually determine each other. The major point we are trying to emphasize is that the human consciousness and thus the personality itself is an indivisible whole but this statement contradicts the assumption concerning the identity crisis given above: here we can refer to the phenomena of heterogeneity as it can help us in clarifying the problem of identity. As we introduced before: we consider the human consciousness as an indivisible whole but “being is not a unity or a whole. Rather, the whole is radically heterogeneous”(Wilson, 2005). Therefore, the modern conceptions reflect the heterogeneity of the human consciousness as “in differing, it (human consciousness) agrees with itself, a backward - turning connection.”(Wilson, 2005). To put it differently: the whole expressed by many-different identities form the whole human consciousness. The reason why we emphasize the importance of Heterogeneity is that it may be the optimal solution to the dualistic primitivism, thus strengthening the minds ability for pluralistic perception of reality. Here the Whole (Monism) is being expressed by heterogeneity (Pluralism), not by Dualism.

### **Social Dimension:**

Now it would be useful to discuss the macro level of the identity issue: that is social dimension. This would be possible by discussing the type of relation between individuals or groups of individuals in minority-majority based system of social interaction. Basically, there exist two main sides in a democratic rule - a ruling one which is majority and the other one which is considered to be minority. Such a state of affairs forms a basis for two main antagonistic points of view which are in rivalry with each other living no alternative to other, different variations for perceiving of political reality. As all political problems are solved in two dimensional systems (majority-minority) other possible points of view are neglected. Here we can refer to the phenomena of Pluralism as a system of values which

reflects individual liberty with its various forms. This statement contradicts with democracy where majority is always right and just. While in democracies individuals can choose one alternative out of two for their self-determination and identification, pluralistic political system may offer absolute freedom of choice to them. Here lies a basis of pluralistic superiority over dualistic primitivism. Political thinking, which is the reflection of human mental activity by its nature, cannot be divided only into two parts (majority-minority). Democratic process indeed involves many more positions as it means the acceptance of all existing points of view. Such a dualistic primitivism of a “majority-minority” based democratic rule does not simply reflect true nature of political thinking. It can be assumed that not the dualism but Pluralism refers to democracy.

Accordingly in that type of society individual is either a representative of majority or minority. The division of society into antagonistic parties creates an atmosphere of inter-personal rivalry and competition expressed by a stereotyped image of “losers and winners”. Eventually this kind of division of society takes a form of a psychological debility in individuals involving the biggest amount of people in the process of political problem. Following the logical line of our discourse we can assume that individuals engaged in political antagonism are being obsessed with Dualistic psychological attitude which disables them from having different perspectives.

That kind of lack of comprehension in individuals creates a situation when two completely different ideologies (expressed by different intentions) clash with each other. Here we come across to the basic issue of the actual political problem: conflict. We will try to find a logical explanation of why conflicts occur. Indeed, we can assume that conflict as such has no logical reason of appearance and assign spontaneous feature to it. But as it seems there must be a common rule which would be the same to all cases. To start with it would be useful to our statement of the problem to determine the essence of conflict. That can be done by linking it with phenomena of competition between individuals as it is one of the main characteristics of conflict. To make it clear: if there are competing points of view and intentions, that means that we face the case of hidden or direct conflict. Basically, the competition between individuals and its logical extension-conflict occurs because of the sameness of their needs and

requirements. Quite obvious that those needs are object directed and the objects of satisfaction of human needs are the same. Here we can refer to Aristotle who defines competition in his “Rhetoric” as follows: “So too we compete with our rivals in sport or in love, and generally with those who are after the same things” It follows that competitors are the ones who have the same sources of earning their lives. Another example which we refer to is Hobbes and his “Leviathan”: “From this equality of ability ariseth equality of hope in the attaining of our ends. And therefore if any two men desire the same thing, which nevertheless they cannot both enjoy, they become enemies; and in the way to their end (which is principally their own conservation, and sometimes their delectation only) endeavor to destroy or subdue one another.” (Hobbes, 2008) As seen from the passage, “if any two men desire the same thing” “with “equality of ability”, they end up with conflict. Again, one more reference from “Leviathan”: “we find three principal causes of quarrel: First, competition; secondly, diffidence; thirdly, glory.”

It would be useful to encounter the point of view of non-western philosophical thinking such as Taoism regarding the issue of competition as there exist similar indications with above given examples. According to Taoism socialization in conventional attitudes injects destructive values into the human consciousness. While the pre-social desires are relatively few and easy to satisfy socialization creates a plethora of desires for “social goods” such as status, reputation and pride. Conventional values, because of their social, comparative nature incite competition and then violence (Hansen, 2008b). The core idea here is that socially constructed desires ruffle individuals' natural tranquility, create competition and strife. As we can see, the paragraph given here echoes the above given references.

Another interesting characteristic of political problem is a transformation of ordinary natural activities into artificially created dimensions which are classified as “political”. Those activities may vary from the fundamental biological facts to the conventionally based deviations of the “political animal”. It is obvious that natural phenomenon transform themselves into conventional terms. Not to say those changes are “metaphysical” but they are quite tangible empirical facts if observed carefully. The important point is how those natural phenomenon reflect and reveal themselves in conventional categories. As mentioned above natural



activities are turned into political ones: the competition between individuals which is a manifestation of “struggle for survival” gains a political feature. In such a dimension every natural phenomenon is turned into political terms. Political feature can be assigned to such a natural fact as death. That phenomenon can even be classified in following terms: “political death”, “political assassination”. Actually political antagonism is a cause of a mentioned phenomenon. This fact once more proves the significance of political way of perception of objective reality and its impact on human life in general. Our purpose here is not to discuss the issue from the point of view of Social Darwinism-“the survival of the fittest”, although this theory stresses competition as well.

Unrestricted violence and competition appear as main reasons for formation of social contract. (Hobbes, 2008) According to the concept of social contract individuals, in order to restrict natural aggression and destructive intentions agree to transfer this energy to the supreme power which is the State. Eventually, that destructive energy transforms (in terms of the State power) and returns back to the people. Here we come across to a very interesting circulation of human energy: natural spontaneity of men (expressed in aggression and destructive tendencies) turn into absolute power of the State. Literally speaking: The Creation dominates on Creators.

### **Phenomena: rights and violation**

It would be interesting to discourse on the concept of rights in the context of political problem. The Taoist terms-pre-social and socialized desires, used above, may be helpful in distinguishing the difference between natural and conventional categories. They reflect Rousseau's assumption that natural state of men (pre-social) was corrupted by society or socialization, and thus, by artificially created institutions. As concept of rights is divided in two main subcategories (natural and conventional), it is crucial to define and observe each of them. Firstly we have to figure out what is the phenomenon of rights. Let's ask the basic question: What is right? It can be regarded as a fundamental need of human for existence. Here lies the core idea of this issue: the right to live for human is its need at the same time. The logical link between rights and needs really does exist. From this point it would be easier to figure out possible relations and

similarities which may be discovered during discourse. According to Hobbes, the essential (natural) law is “to use his own power, as he will himself, for the preservation of his own Nature; that is to say, of his own Life; and consequently, of doing any thing, which in his own judgment, and Reason, he shall conceive to be the aptest means thereunto.” (Hobbes, 2008) Recognition of right for living of a human being (live organism) is at first sight an endeavor on a biological level to justify it. But let us first ask such a question: why the phenomenon of rights appeared as a vital necessity? As it seems it gains a crucial significance because humans are the objects of violation and here rights appear as the tool of protection of human life and if a human life was not under the danger the rights wouldn't have appeared. The next interesting point is as follows: from what or from whom do the rights protect human? How paradoxical it may seem but it protects them from other human beings. According to the” European Convention for the protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms” the right to life is determined in- Article 2-right to life.( European Convention for the protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms) Another declaration which protects life is Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 3 (United Nations, 1948). The content of these articles are the same: Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person. As introduced above we can assume that rights exist because humans are the object of violation, in other words they protect humans from other humans. As we can see, “human rights are minimal standards. They are concerned with avoiding the terrible rather than with achieving the best.”(Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy) We can also refer to a very curious fact: there exist animal rights and it is not difficult to guess that these rights also protect animals from human violation. Because women are discriminated Women's rights gain its importance. As seen from above the phenomenon of rights deal mainly with a fundamental need of human being for living.

Another crucial aspect of this concept is a right to possess or in other words: the right to property. The right to possess something is regarded as one of the fundamental needs after the right to live. But the statement is not clear and contains in itself points which awoke suspicions. The main question is: is the right of property a natural right? Property is considered natural right for those who already possess it. For those who do not, the idea of property as a natural right does not have any sense or meaning. It is

obvious that not all individuals possess property, so as it seems, it is a discrimination to give the right to possess to those who already do possess when the status of those who do not possess any property is fixed. The statement seems logical: justification of the right to property is an endeavor of maintaining a status quo, mainly: possession for those who already possess and non-possession for those who do not possess. Stemming from these statements, the counter argument of the assumption that the property is a natural right may be formulated as follows: Property as a possession of material values is not something fixed and depends on circumstances and personal abilities. It may be as easily lost as successfully gained and the right to possess becomes vital after gaining it. So in this respect it can be assumed that the property right is a conventional category rather than a natural one as it is dependable on circumstances and is not something fixed. Once more, we refer to Aristotle regarding the accidental nature of property: "And hence too a question is raised, whether it (wealth, honor, power) is a thing that can be learned, or acquired by habituation or discipline of some other kind, or whether it comes in the way of divine dispensation or even in the way of chance". (GradeSaver, 2008)

The interesting point is that while the "European Convention for the protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms" determines the right to life as a fundamental need it does not foresee the right to property at all. As seen from the above mentioned the common point of rights to existence and to possess is that both of them are the objects of violation and the phenomenon of rights appears as a tool of their protection and preservation.

Now that we have discussed the problem of rights it would be of an interest to find a logical link between the concepts of identity and rights. We can see that such kind of link really exists; the evidence of this assumption is the pluralistic approach of post-modern scientific frameworks regarding the issue of rights which is very much similar with the concept of identity in its general features. For example, Feminism stresses gender based discriminations of identities; consequently, there arise appropriate numbers of rights for each identity. As mentioned above, many identities exist which cause the separation and division of the whole human consciousness into different personalities. One can really observe a curious quantitative accordance between the concepts of identities and the rights.

Namely, there exist an appropriate number of rights to each identity known in post-modern frameworks. Let us give a simple example: ethnic identity-ethnic rights, racial identity-racial rights, gender identity-gender rights, sexual identity-sexual rights, political identity-political rights and so on. We can talk about one exception: there is no an animal identity as such but animal rights do exist. (!) Of course, all those rights can be regarded as parts of one whole concept of Human rights but still, there remains something obscure: the concept of Human rights is divided into pieces just like the Human consciousness is separated into different identities (personalities).

As stated above- the political truth is indifferent to the objective reality but it expresses the thoughts and intentions of the subject (individual). Hence it follows that political thinking is a set of artificially created social distinctions. Indeed the formation of political way of thinking is one of the most significant inventions of human mind but it also causes alienation of individual existence from its inner essence so that we can figure out alienation on two levels: individual and interpersonal levels.

The same correlation can be found between individual human existences and artificially created social institutions. As shown above, individuals agree to transfer their energy to the supreme power. Following the issue of transformation of spontaneous human energy into supreme power of the State we face the case of division and separation between natural and conventional rights. This point often seems confusing as they are somehow mixed with each other making the definition more complex. In most cases Conventional rights are the reflections of Natural rights. (As explored above-in divisible mental activity: separated “Myself” appears as the reflection of “I”, the same happens with Natural and Conventional rights: Conventional appears as the reflection of Natural) Here once more we come across with an idea of alienation of human activity (Natural rights or needs) from its inner essence. All those rights (or needs) refer to the spontaneity of human existence and they have no deterministic ground which could have a cause and effect feature. What we mean here is that natural spontaneity of human functions regardless from all mentally created categories.

Mainly the term-spontaneity of existence refers to the accidental feature of human life as such. That specific feature of human existence can

not be foreseen, predicted or planned systematically as it happens in social structure. Even social events can not be fully predicted and this issue appeals to one of the most significant problems of Social Science in general: the possibility of prevision of social events. In such a case conventional rights (system of values) appear as the regulator of natural rights. Those are two different human activities which are in non-accordance with each other. To be more concrete: natural needs are functioning regardless from all socially constructed institutions while the conventional categories are entirely subjective and artificial phenomena. In other words: subjective controls and regulates objective (needs). That is why in most cases system of Law fails to react adequately to the various effects caused by functioning of natural rights (needs)

The Conventional/Natural dichotomy has a specific interpretation in Taoism, which would be useful to the statement of the problem. It (Taoism) regards conventional norms and values as artificially and thus, socially constructed. Moreover, it goes beyond the given distinction and gives a linguistic based explanation of this dichotomy:” Taoism treats the concepts of natural/conventional, as a pivotal distinction. It teaches us a potentially controversial way to draw the distinction, i.e., anything based on 'language' is conventional” (Hansen, 2008a).

Such kinds of interpretations make further discussions of the issue possible with different approaches.

## **Conclusion**

We can conclude the following: first, the phenomenon of political thinking is a means of self-control and self-regulation of a separated consciousness as it appears a self-inflicted mental puzzle. (“I” and “myself“) From this steams that: second, the actual political problem is the direction of subjective mental distinctions and categories of the particular individual or group of individuals towards other groups or individuals whose intentions, as well as perceptions are entirely subjective too. Third, in co-relation between natural and conventional rights the latter appears as the reflection of the first one, accordingly natural rights are primary to the conventional ones.

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