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Methods and Epistemologies in the History of Political Thought. Introductory Notes for a Debate between the Global and the Local

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The Urgency of a Debate between the Global and the Local

This special issue of *Politics. Rivista di Studi Politici* stems from the desire to promote a pluralistic debate on the epistemological status of the History of Political Thought. We made the decision to address and foster this debate on the ten-year anniversary from the publication of our first issue, and indeed this attention to foundational debates aligns with the journal's editorial mission. From its start in 2014, the journal has chosen methodological reflection as one of its core themes, and extensive interest from scholars of various nationalities to the call for papers for this issue highlights a widespread attention to these questions, as well as a shared desire to foster an international debate.

In line with the aim of broadening the discussion on the epistemological status of the field, in 2024 the journal also promoted, in collaboration with the University of Naples "L'Orientale," a conference dedicated to the methods, epistemologies, and canon of the History of Political Thought¹. Primarily aimed at Italian scholars, the conference provided an opportunity to confirm once again a widespread willingness to reflect critically on these matters. Both the call for papers for the special issue and the conference revealed the relevance – if not the outright urgency – of encouraging dialogue, thus contributing to a debate that is increasingly international and closely tied to a global approach to the field itself (Dunn 2018).

The urgency of discussing certain methodological questions, as well as the potential challenges these entail within an increasingly globalised academic context, have recently re-emerged with the publication in *Scienza & Politica* of an article by Davide Cadeddu. Drawing in particular on work by Danielle Charette and Max Skjõnsberg (2020) and Richard Whatmore (2021), the article highlights some potential risks involved in theorising a global History of Political Thought without a thorough reflection on the role of this field of research, on what is actually meant by "context,"

¹ *Political Thought in Context? Metodologie, epistemologie, canone*, University of Naples "L'Orientale", 20 December 2024. The conference was also an opportunity for colleagues to engage in discussion on the occasion of the hundredth anniversary of the establishment of the first Italian university course in "History of Institutions and Political Doctrines."

and on how the scholar's perspective should be considered (Cadeddu 2023)². The article, which draws attention to a potential ideological slant in certain self-representations of the History of political thought in the Anglophone context, received significant responses from numerous prominent scholars – for the most part affiliated with UK universities – who accepted Cadeddu's invitation and further expanded the discussion (Dunn et al. 2023).

At the same time, this debate also served to highlight once more some of the critical issues surrounding the possibility of a truly global conversation within the field. This is not a new question. As detailed in the volume edited by Dario Castiglione and Iain Hampsher-Monk (2001), a comparative analysis of the History of Political Thought across various national contexts reveals differences so significant that the idea of a single, transnational history of the field is clearly problematic. Indeed, beyond the more or less faithful translation of the expression "History of Political Thought" into other languages, what this phrase actually refers to can vary significantly from one national context to another (Collini 2001).

Nonetheless, although such differences do complicate the idea of viewing the History of Political Thought as a field with a single, transnational identity, the increasing internationalisation of scholars in recent decades has helped to narrow individual intellectual distances. This development makes it increasingly plausible to imagine the possibility of *the* History of Political Thought in the singular, rather than in the plural. It would allow us to conceptualise academic debate in the field as a complex yet increasingly interconnected process, bolstered by the widespread use of a single lingua franca. Indeed, English clearly defines the primary linguistic boundary of this debate, not only because it is the language of the international academic community, but also because the United Kingdom is undoubtedly home to some of the scholars who have most significantly shaped the main themes of discussion from the late 1960s to the present, thanks to their scholarly rigour, analytical and theoretical ability, and sustained contributions over time.

As we know, John Dunn, Quentin Skinner, and John G.A. Pocock were the first to initiate certain explicitly methodological reflections that would go on to have an extraordinary impact³. Despite the differences between their respective arguments, their shared emphasis on the methodology of the History of Political Thought succeeded in transforming their reflections into a discourse that has influenced generations of scholars. This justifies the widespread use of the term "Cambridge School" when referring to certain methodological concerns.

Situated within the context in which those reflections emerged, the emphasis on method responded to the need to equip the History of Political Thought with a methodological framework capable of lending it greater "scientificity" compared to the History of Ideas as it had developed in the Anglophone academic world, largely

² On the category of the "global" in the History of Political Thought, see Moyn and Sartori (2013), Armitage (2014), Dunn (2018), Babb (2018). A call to critically reflect on the category of the "global" in political thought has also been made by Lazzarich (2024). The contribution to the debate offered by the journal *Global Intellectual History* is also worth noting. See Rosales and López (2019).

³ Among the earliest writings by the three authors, see Dunn (1968, now 1980), Skinner 1969 (and the essays collected in Skinner 2002), and the essays by Pocock gathered in *Politics, Language, and Time* (1989, first ed. 1971), among which is also *The history of political thought: a methodological inquiry* (1962).

thanks to the work of Arthur Lovejoy (1936)⁴. One of the principal targets of critique was a view of ideas – political or otherwise – as being capable of transcending historical periods and various philosophical systems and belief structures, almost irrespective of their historical contexts (Dunn 1968). On this specific point, Skinner developed a sharp and articulate methodological critique. Drawing inspiration from Robin G. Collingwood, he asserted the essential need to historicise political ideas by placing them within their historical-intellectual contexts (Skinner 2001 and 2002, 57-8).

In their article, Charette and Skjönsberg (2020) provide a broad overview of the state of the debate on the History of Political Thought over recent decades, rightly and inevitably assigning a central role to the Cambridge School in the development of key methodological issues – not only within the Anglophone world. Despite the fact that the contextualist approach has been subjected to detailed criticism from various perspectives over time⁵, the Cambridge School continues to serve as a fundamental point of reference in the international debate on the History of Political Thought – and Intellectual History more broadly.

Of course, this does not mean that some of the themes most emphatically raised by the Cambridge School from its inception – such as the historicisation of ideas within their proper context – were completely new or had not already been addressed in other national debates (as we shall later see in the Italian case). Nevertheless, the enormous impact of these scholars on the relevant academic community has drawn renewed attention to these issues. The Cambridge School’s ability to articulate their arguments with clarity and conviction – and to do so in the lingua franca – undoubtedly contributed to stimulating reflections of international scope. Likewise, the circulation of ideas within Anglophone academic research centres further amplified the scope of the debate initiated by the Cambridge School⁶.

For a Debate within the Italian Academic Context

In Italy, over the past decades, there has been somewhat limited interest in fostering discussions on the epistemological status of the History of Political Thought, despite the significant tradition the discipline holds within the national academic context. Exactly a century ago, Gaetano Mosca delivered the first Italian course on the “History of Institutions and Political Doctrines” at the University of Rome “La Sapienza” (D’Addio 1993), marking the official beginning of a discipline that, over time, would consolidate its standing within the Italian academic landscape⁷. From

⁴ The critique of this conception of history was also directed at other authors, such as George Sabine and Leo Strauss. In particular, the latter is criticized by Skinner for his idea of interpreting texts by considering what authors could not say in a given historical context (Strauss 1952, 24-5; Skinner 2002, 71-2).

⁵ Charette and Skjönsberg (2020) refer to three main critiques of Skinner: that of reductionism, raised by Rosanvallon (2020); that of ignoring the religious context (Chapman, Coffey, and Gregory 2009); and that of overly restricting context to the linguistic sphere (Burke 2017). For further critiques of Skinner, see especially Tully (1988).

⁶ See, for example, the so-called ‘Sussex School’, ‘Harvard School’, and ‘Berkeley School’ (Charette and Skjönsberg 2020, 475-6).

⁷ In 2024, the designation “History of Political Doctrines,” which had identified the discipline within the Italian academic classification system, was changed to “History of Political Thought”.

1924 onwards, a debate that had already begun in Italy towards the end of the 19th century gained momentum, reflecting a more urgent necessity at that point in time. The formal institutionalisation of teaching the discipline made it more pressing to outline the epistemological status of the History of Political Doctrines, highlighting the distinctiveness of this field in relation to adjacent ones such as the History of Philosophy, the History of Ideas, or Political Science. Thus began a lively discussion on the “dual doctrinal aspect of teaching and scientific research” in the History of Political Doctrines (Testoni Binetti 1999, 55)⁸.

In a 1933 volume collecting a «faithful summary» of the lectures Mosca had delivered over eight years, the Sicilian scholar explained his use of the term «political doctrines» as a synonym for «political thought», intended to describe that force of an «intellectual nature» which, alongside material forces, ensures the cohesion of a society (Mosca 1933, 1). Benedetto Croce also contributed in his own way, urging that the History of Political Thought be anchored to the study of the great works of political theory, thereby drawing it closer to the speculative dimension of politics and distancing it from the practical one (Croce 1924). As Testoni Binetti (1971) explains, under the shadow of Crocean historicism – and a certain anti-positivist neo-idealism – scholars such as Carlo Morandi, Carlo Curcio, Rodolfo Mondolfo, Arturo Beccari, and Adolfo Ravà were the main drivers of a methodological debate that would continue throughout the 1930s, addressing issues that would later resurface – not only in the Italian context. To offer just a few examples: Morandi reflected on the relationship between the History of Political Thought and the socio-economic-historical context, with particular attention to historiography in the Italian Risorgimento; Curcio addressed the need for a rigorous methodology in classifying political theories, to secure the discipline’s autonomy from neighbouring fields; Mondolfo focused on the influence of historical materialism; Beccari attempted to delineate the discontinuities between political and economic doctrines; Ravà, in turn, advanced the idea that the object of the History of Political Thought should not be detached from the legal dimension of politics.

It is clear, then, that key methodological issues – also in line with subsequent international debates – did emerge early on in the Italian context. It is no coincidence, indeed, that some of these themes were taken up and further developed in the following decades by scholars such as Adolfo Momigliano, Federico Chabod, Delio Cantimori, Rodolfo De Mattei, Pietro Piovani, Giuseppe Santonastaso, Alessandro Passerin d’Entrèves, Luigi Firpo, Norberto Bobbio, and Nicola Matteucci.

However, as Angelo D’Orsi also observes (2001, 92), from the post-World War II period onwards, the methodological debate in Italy lost much of its vitality, just as analytical philosophy, neopositivism, pragmatism, and the strengthening of the social sciences were gaining ground. Perhaps partly for this reason, in a 1972 work, Firpo returned to the question of the specificity of the «History of Political Thought» in relation to Political Science and Political Sociology on one hand, and to Political Philosophy on the other. He argued that while the first seeks to historically reconstruct and critically analyse reflections developed throughout human history, the other fields focus

⁸ See also Testoni Binetti (2006).

respectively on «the actual behaviours within human societies» and «the great categories into which political thinking has been structured» (Firpo 1972, VI).

As is evident, the definition of the epistemological status of the History of Political Thought within the Italian context has always been somewhat problematic, partly because those working in this field have, over time, developed diverse scientific and intellectual approaches to research. In fact, within this academic community, the well-established attention to historical context – firmly rooted in the historicist tradition – has often been accompanied by a strong interest in the theoretical dimension of politics, to the point that the boundaries between this and disciplines such as the History of Philosophy, Political Philosophy, or Conceptual History have not always been clearly defined (Scuccimarra 2021). Over time, this proximity has led to the coexistence of highly diverse languages, categories, methods, and research objects, making it difficult in some cases to identify a genuine common ground for discussion among historians of political thought themselves.

The absence of an ongoing methodological debate is undoubtedly one of the factors contributing to the variety of approaches in this field, and it has hindered efforts to synthesise the different strands within the discipline. Investigating why, in Italy, methodological discussions have so significantly declined since the post-war period is a subject that would be worthy in itself of specific analysis. Certainly, the political and cultural context in which the Italian academic community found itself during the 1960s and 70s – with the rise of Marxism inside and outside universities, and a broader radical politicisation of society – played a role. It cannot be overlooked that, for some scholars, the role of the academic and intellectual was seen as a service to revolutionary transformation. This undoubtedly contributed to shifting the focus of the Italian debate away from how research is conducted (method) to what is being researched (object), within a broader framework of opposition between ‘truths’ and ‘errors’.

With the fall of the Berlin Wall and the consequent end/redefinition of 20th-century ideologies, the Italian academic context became deeply depoliticised, eventually leading to a significant shift in how the role itself of the academic scholar was understood. Still, today there is a strong sense of urgency among Italian scholars of History of Political Thought to pause and reflect on certain issues that extend beyond strictly methodological concerns, involving a broader reflection on epistemologies and the canon.

Which Methods and Canons for the Contemporary Observer?

The renewed interest in a broad and international debate on the History of Political Thought is, in some ways, inevitable when considering the increasingly rapid technological, political, and cultural changes of this historical phase. The current generation of historians conducts their research in ways unimaginable to the previous generation, thanks to the easy access to a growing number of digitized or digital sources: a volume of data that requires the development of new investigative methods capable of harmoniously combining quantitative and qualitative elements. In the same vein, the advent of artificial intelligence in the field of humanities is rapidly determining a new way of accessing and managing sources, making incursions into areas unknown until a few years ago – with all the necessary cautions in this still

nascent phase of AI. Additionally, the increasing interconnection, both in-person and remotely, among scholars from distant geographical areas has enhanced opportunities for exchanging opinions, thus fostering an increasingly global intellectual environment.

Finally, we cannot fail to note the way that war is currently forcefully reasserting itself in the redefinition of international relations, just as new international orders are forming. In the West, the liberal procedures of representative democracies seem increasingly weak in the face of populist, if not outright authoritarian, pressures; the gap between the rich and the poor has reached unprecedented levels, and the growing power of economic lobbies threatens the popular sovereignty of representative bodies.

The combination of all these factors – and many others could be included – significantly alters the context, which, as such, inevitably raises new questions and creates the need for new political theories. Therefore, the perspective of the current observer cannot help but be influenced by this, making a broader critical reflection on their own epistemic positioning as a historian necessary.

Benedetto Croce stated that every history is, in its own way, «contemporary history» because every historiographical reconstruction is linked to the present «practical need» of the historian (Croce 1966, 11). Edward H. Carr echoed this sentiment, writing that «history essentially consists of looking at the past through the eyes of the present and in the light of the problems of the present», so the questions posed to the past are always determined by the «intellectual interests» of the present (Carr 1966, 41).

In this perspective, history is always the product of the writing process accomplished through the historiographical act of the historian (Arnold 2009, 8). It appears then important to stress that the observer's perspective changes depending on the spatiotemporal context in which they find themselves, and on the questions posed to the past itself, also in light of the redefinition of certain power relations that prompt a rewriting of certain histories. A rewriting that, in the case of the History of Political Thought, finds its most significant qualifying point in the redefinition of the canon of what we call “political thought”.

In an essay first published in Italian in 1992, John Dunn succinctly and effectively reconstructed the main issues of the «history of Western political theory» – this is the expression he used – specifying that the «core» of this subject «is a relatively defined canon of texts that have assumed the status of classics» (Dunn 1992, 26)⁹. As noted, unlike Firpo (1972), Dunn problematized the universal claim of the History of Political Thought, limiting the scope of the subject to a core of authors considered foundational to Western intellectual history. Furthermore, the same English author did not fail to critically question the canons that are historically determined, observing that it is not «possible to separate the question of the ideal constitution [...] of the canon from the problem of what truth it should reveal» (Dunn 1992, 28)¹⁰.

On this point, Dunn touches on one of the crucial nodes of the constitution of the canon of political thought, namely the foundational and mythopoietic value of the

⁹ Dunn cites Condren (1985).

¹⁰ An analysis of Dunn's text and some of the criticisms leveled against him can be found in Cadeddu (2021).

canon itself. Inevitably, the ‘classics’ function, more or less indirectly, as self-representations of a human group at a given historical moment and of the ‘truth’ that serves as the ethical and scientific foundation of that group. Is it ever possible that the historiographical production of a canon is not also the production of knowledge conditioned by specific power relations?¹¹

This seems to be the question we are called to answer in light of some pressing issues that are emerging ever more forcefully. Indeed, one of the most urgent questions regarding the epistemological status of the History of (Western) Political Thought is not so much that of method but rather that of redefining the canon to include discounted and silenced voices. First and foremost, those of the women who have contributed to theoretical reflection on politics; then those of authors usually deemed ‘peripheral’ and whose roles are being reconsidered thanks to greater attention to intellectual exchanges between ‘center’ and ‘periphery.’ Although they each have their distinct paths and histories, both these instances critically question a certain perimeter of political thought in what is clearly the reflection of a broader critique of the model of Western knowledge-power as patriarchal, Eurocentric, and colonial.

Regarding the inclusion of women’s voices, recent years have seen a proliferation of publications focusing on the historiographical reconstruction of female thinkers to achieve a more gender-balanced canon¹². On the other front, the most significant insights come from Postcolonial Studies, which reconstruct the important roles played by influential authors such as Edward Said, Gayatri Spivak, Homi K. Bhabha, Achille Mbembe, and others, in theorizing politics from perspectives that do not solely view the world from the West downward¹³. Despite the differences in their paths, both critical perspectives reveal with great immediacy the ‘political’ dimension concerning the definition of the canon, further confirming the fluid and contingent nature of the canon itself in political thought.

The final observation will serve here to highlight that, among the objects of study in the History of Political Thought, greater attention should be paid to reflections on the ‘external’ dimension of politics¹⁴. The realm of ‘international relations’ is an area that obviously predates the formulation of the very category of ‘international relations,’ as well as the emergence in the 20th century of the discipline that bears this name. The study of internationalist political thought opens up discussions that are not, strictly speaking, about international relations – understood as the ‘scientific’ study of political

¹¹ Foucault’s attention to the shift from history to genealogy effectively captures the problematic issue of the inseparability between historiographical reconstruction and the present from which the inquiry originates (Foucault 1997).

¹² Among the first editorial series to move in this direction is Routledge’s *Thinking Gender*. Among the earliest strictly historiographical works, noteworthy contributions include Carroll and Smith (2000) and Broad and Green (2009). In Italy, the cultural and editorial project *Donne e pensiero politico*, promoted by the G. Salvemini Institute of Historical Studies and edited by Cristina Cassina, Giuseppe Sciarra, and Federico Trocini, stands out.

¹³ Significant works include Ashcroft, Griffith, and Tiffin (2025) and Cariello and Guarracino (2021), which provide a concise yet effective framing of the issue.

¹⁴ Aside from the more traditional and, in some respects, dated – from a historiographical approach – works of Martin Wight, among the first texts that attempted a methodological reflection in this sense, as well as the definition of a canon for the history of internationalist political thought, see Neufeld (1995) and Brown, Nardin, and Rengger (2002). In Italian, see the volume edited by Campi and Chiaruzzi (2025).

facts concerning relations between nations – and for this reason it can offer this field extremely fruitful diachronic depth.

As clearly emerges from what has been said so far, the topics to be addressed in debating the epistemological status of the History of Political Thought are numerous and varied. Thus, it is necessary and urgent to increase the opportunities for debate, allowing for methodological reflection to establish a shared toolbox of methods, languages, and categories, through which to study political thought in an increasingly global academic context.

Thematic Guidelines

Although the nine articles collected in this special issue inevitably cover only a portion of the possible methodological and epistemological concerns¹⁵, the themes they address engage deeply with a number of crucial and problematic questions at the heart of the contemporary debate. For this reason, determining the sequence of the articles in this issue was no easy task, and the order selected is merely one of many possible arrangements – especially considering that several articles engage in dialogue with one another from multiple angles, thereby expanding the range of potential groupings. The chosen order follows some of the main thematic lines, such as the theory of methodology and epistemology in the History of Political Thought, the construction of the canon, and the methods of History of Political Thought.

The volume opens with an article by Andrew Sartori, who explores the structural connection between political and economic thought, focusing on the role of political economy in the formation of capitalist commercial society. Drawing on the reflections of Istvan Hont, Sartori offers a meticulous analysis that demonstrates how the history of modern political thought must be understood in dialogue with the history of capitalism from the early modern period – when state formation and commercial processes required a political economy capable of supporting a specific ethical-political project. Sartori argues that the history of economic practices should be considered – alongside the history of institutions – as an integral part of modern political thought. In particular, he emphasizes the importance of Adam Smith's thought in inspiring a new epistemic project grounded in the knowledge of "commercial statecraft" (the art of governance through commerce). Recalling Marxist critique, Sartori further contends that the mechanisms of capitalist commercial society can be fully grasped only by understanding the formative role of political economy, which historically shaped the societies it studied through its dual nature as both knowledge and epistemic framework. Working on the line between the theoretical and the political, Sartori concludes by highlighting the importance of investigating the epistemic project of political economy – not only to understand its connection to political thought, but also to grasp the authoritative power of this knowledge across various colonial contexts.

The reconsideration of the relationship between the History of Political Thought and other fields of knowledge is also addressed in "The History of Political Thought and the

¹⁵ In particular, I would like to highlight the lack of articles addressing the issue of the canon and female voices. To at least partially remedy this gap, *Politics. Rivista di Studi Politici* has decided to dedicate a special issue to the topic in 2026: "Another Revolution. Political Thought, from the Woman Question to Gender", edited by Laura Mitarotondo and Fiorenza Taricone.

Social Imaginary.” Here, Samuel Moyn reflects on the tendency within the historiography of political thought to avoid engagement with social theory – a confrontation that, in his view, is fruitful because it urges historians to refrain from treating ideas as detached from society and instead to see them as integral to the processes that construct and deconstruct social reality. In this light, Moyn revisits insights emerging from recent developments in the humanities concerning the formulation of the concept of the social imaginary, which challenges the distinction between representations and social practices. Drawing on Cornelius Castoriadis, and in dialogue with scholars such as William H. Sewell, Pierre Rosanvallon, Judith Surkis, and Andrew Sartori, Moyn argues that this theoretical tradition resists the notion of the transcendence of concepts, as upheld by certain strands of historiography. As a result, he calls for intellectual history to treat every idea as part of a broader social process and to blur disciplinary boundaries, since, as he asserts, “a true social history of ideas is the only plausible form of intellectual history.” Thus, Moyn too opens up a critical perspective on both the object of inquiry and the epistemology of the History of Political Thought, entering into conversation with many of the articles in this volume.

A critique of the epistemology of the History of Political Thought is also central to “Political Cosmologies in Global Politics: An Interlocution of Jacques Derrida and Eric Voegelin.” With a strong deconstructive thrust, Hartmut Behr begins by questioning the very idea of the (Western) individual – conceived as a rational, autonomous, sovereign subject, master of the world and of all that is “other.” To overcome the dualistic anthropology underpinning this conception, Behr draws on Jacques Derrida and Eric Voegelin’s critiques of the Western mind’s claim to provide answers even to that which is inherently unanswerable. Behr thus proposes recovering the idea – echoing Aristotle – that the human condition is marked by an existential tension toward a transcendent space that is ultimately unknowable. On this basis, he introduces the notion of political cosmologies: unlike traditional cosmologies, which are grounded in essentializing and theological dualisms, political cosmologies, for Behr, are relational discourses that transcend the dominant ontological and epistemological categories of major political and theoretical traditions. Through a compelling theoretical journey, Behr argues that political cosmologies are conceptual frameworks proposing a way of thinking about politics (theory) that is inherently open, relational, and non-definitive – therefore in direct contrast with systems of thought that offer final and definitive answers (ideologies). This perspective, he claims, carries important practical implications at both the epistemological and theoretical levels, allowing us to move beyond Eurocentrism and toward a truly global political theory.

Albeit from different perspectives, a radical critique of Western politico-philosophical modernity also lies at the heart of the article by Giovanni Ruocco and Stefano Visentin, which reconstructs the theoretical and historical trajectory of postcolonial studies. As the authors note, postcolonial critique is not merely a field of study, but also a critical stance and an epistemic-political method that questions both the heuristic validity of the European model and the epistemic violence of a paradigm that fosters processes of “othering” and racialization. From a critical-political perspective, then, postcolonial critique seeks to dismantle the European narrative that places the West at the apex of a certain historically constructed idea of progress, rooted in knowledge-power

relations. By examining key figures in the Indian Subaltern Studies Group (Guha, Chatterjee, Chakrabarty, and Spivak, among others), the article critically raises the question of rewriting the History of Political Thought from the margins, asserting that the contribution of subaltern actors – historically marginalized by hegemonic historiography – can support a form of universalism based on dialogue among differences, rather than their absorption by the West.

A critical dialogue with postcolonial studies, within a broader reflection on epistemology and the canon of the History of Political Thought, is also found in “Between Theorization, Politicization, and Comparison: Studying Political Thought in the 21st Century.” In this article, Franco Di Sciullo examines the two main pillars of the discipline: the traditional Western canon and the method based on the universalization of concepts. Regarding the latter, he revisits the critiques raised by postcolonial studies against the Western politico-philosophical model, reviewing key theoretical issues and emphasizing the political dimension of this theoretical approach. While Di Sciullo acknowledges some of the problems raised by postcolonial criticism – especially the ideological charge of universal concepts – he argues that postcolonial methodology fails to fully transcend the model it critiques, due to the excessively theoretical nature of its stance. He identifies a solution in a method that tightly integrates history and political thought, but also demands a critical self-awareness on the part of scholars. In practice, every contextualization of canonical texts should be accompanied by the scholar’s own self-contextualization – that is, an awareness of the cultural and social conditioning through which political thought is observed. For Di Sciullo, the crisis of traditional methods reveals the need for a new form of thinking that unites analysis, critique, and historical research, thus generating a political thought that is both academic and ethical.

Also adopting a critical perspective toward traditional historiographical methods is Pietro Sebastianelli’s article, which explores Michel Foucault’s contribution to the History of Political Thought through his Nietzschean-inspired genealogical method. Sebastianelli traces how Foucault critiques traditional historicism by moving beyond universal concepts – such as the notions of author, doctrine, and the substantial state – and toward a diagnostic perspective on the present, in which history no longer serves as a teacher of life. In this reversal of perspective, the present becomes the locus of the questions from which genealogical investigation into the past must begin. By bringing Foucault’s framework into dialogue with the historiography of Reinhart Koselleck’s conceptual history and Quentin Skinner’s political discourse, Sebastianelli analyzes the main continuities and discontinuities among these methodologies. He also addresses the issue of methodological nominalism, through which Foucault does not deny the reality of objects but suspends judgment on the a priori existence of universals like the state or doctrines, focusing instead on the singularity of the processes and practices from which they emerge. The picture of Foucault’s method is completed by an examination of anarchaeology – a critical attitude toward the supposed necessity of power – which places the researcher within the problems studied. For Sebastianelli, Foucault’s genealogy offers a tool for renewing the critical function of the History of Political Thought, shifting the focus from doctrines to the interplay of knowledge and practices, and analyzing the contingent conditions under

which phenomena emerge. The article thus provides a rich exploration of the critique of Western political thought, particularly concerning the knowledge-power nexus that has profoundly influenced postcolonial critique.

The final three articles are more directly concerned with methodological reflection, though each follows a distinct path. Takashi Shogimen offers a rigorous logical analysis of Quentin Skinner's category of context, highlighting its theoretical debt to Charles Sanders Peirce's concept of abduction, building on arguments Shogimen had already developed in 2016. According to him, Skinner's methodology applies context in two logical ways, which Shogimen terms heuristic contextualization and verificatory contextualization. The first involves invoking pre-existing knowledge (context) to identify a "surprising fact" that requires explanation, with the hypothesis formulated through an abductive process. The second involves describing that pre-existing knowledge to verify the plausibility of the hypothesis (an inductive process). Shogimen compares his dual concept with Hans Reichenbach's distinction between the context of discovery and the context of justification, highlighting key differences and paying special attention to the logical (rather than psychological) dimension of discovering surprising facts. He also identifies similarities between his categories and those recently proposed by sociologist Richard Swedberg, based on Reichenbach's framework. Through these comparisons, Shogimen argues for the existence of a logical structure underlying historical inquiry. Furthermore – in theoretical continuity with Sartori and Moyn – he affirms that contextualization is not a "thing" but the result of a logical action performed by historians.

In "Strauss, Ginzburg and the Oldest Gesture of Humanity: Epistemological Reflections on the History of Political Thought," Cristiano Barbieri reconstructs a page of historiography by analyzing the methodological convergences between Leo Strauss and Carlo Ginzburg, focusing on their shared interest in uncovering hidden signs within historical inquiry. Barbieri traces how Strauss, in his broader critique of metaphysical historicism and modern rationalism, develops – following Nietzsche – a hermeneutics of reticence, which interprets omissions, repetitions, and contradictions in philosophical texts to uncover their esoteric teachings. In the Italian context, Strauss's reflections find an echo in Ginzburg, the most compelling interpreter of a method aimed at "reading between the lines." Specifically, Ginzburg's "evidential paradigm" focuses on seemingly negligible details, in continuity with Giovanni Morelli's "philology of particulars." Unlike Strauss, however, Ginzburg applies a broader methodology that includes materials independent of authors' intentions and voluntary silences. The article thus offers a critical reflection on a historiographical approach that remains marginal today, especially following the critiques of Strauss by the Cambridge School. Precisely for this reason, however, it provides stimulating insights for the History of Political Thought.

The volume concludes with an article by Fausto Proietti, which offers an overview of the revolutionary research methods made available by digital technologies. Proietti examines the tremendous impact that digital humanities are having on the analysis of texts in the History of Political Thought. The essay retraces the two phases of this digital revolution: the "pioneering" phase, dating back to the second half of the 20th century; and the current phase, in which massive online textual databases allow ever-

broader access to vast digitized corpora. The author explores the significant opportunities these tools offer to the History of Political Thought, from in-depth lexicometric analyses that facilitate the discovery of unknown occurrences, to the reconstruction of term origins and meaning shifts, and the study of emerging political cultures. At the same time, Proietti highlights not only current technical limitations – such as false positives/negatives or the opacity of prestructured databases – but also the cognitive risks posed by the illusion of completeness these tools may give the historian. He rightly identifies these enormous digital databases as marking a fundamental epistemological shift, a “new linguistic turn” that drastically expands the range of sources available to lexically oriented intellectual history. The article thus invites us to broaden the dialogue between hermeneutic and empirical approaches, as we reflect on the new research methods now available – methods that are increasingly defining our present, while already projecting us into the future of the History of Political Thought.

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