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THE PAST AND PRESENT OF POLITICAL EPISTEMOLOGIES OF (EASTERN) EUROPE[1]

A special section on *political epistemologies* today almost automatically evokes thoughts about the rising of a post-democratic age that comes with a new kind of rationality. Journalistic veracity and scientific reasoning as the pillars of familiar truth regimes of the late 20th and early 21st centuries seem to have given way to epistemic vices based on authoritarian and illiberal identity politics as well as the new economy of attention in social networks. This transition is of paramount importance for political stability and consensus building on a global scale, since a successful translation of a plurality of national perspec-

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[1]   This is a revised version of the introduction by Friedrich Cain and Bernhard Kleeberg to the conference "Political Epistemologies of Eastern Europe", Max Weber Centre for Advanced Cultural and Social Studies, University of Erfurt, November 24th–25th 2017, organised by Friedrich Cain, Dietlind Hüchtker, Bernhard Kleeberg and Jan Surman. The papers of this special section are selected from the aforementioned as well as the conference "Soviet States and Beyond: Political Epistemologies of/and Marxism 1917–1945–1968", Poletayev Institute for Theoretical and Historical Studies in the Humanities, National Research University Higher School of Economics, Moscow, June 21st–22nd 2018, organised by Friedrich Cain, Alexander Dmitriev, Dietlind Hüchtker and Jan Surman.

tives into a joint one relies on a common rationality based on accordant epistemic categories, practices, and values.

With this special section of *Historyka*, we suggest a historical approach to the political perspectivity of epistemologies that might help to shed some light on current phenomena in political culture. A broader history of *European epistemologies* will probably show a significant variance in respect to the cultural shaping of rationalities and epistemological categories throughout the 20th century. In order to better understand recent epistemological transitions and the new kind of rationality that gains ground, we thus have to analyse its genealogy, the different local, regional, and national histories of rationality; we have to ask about its alleged former homogeneity (if there was one), and the possible homogenisation of epistemologies and truth regimes as a consequence of the Cold War; we have to study the techniques of establishing, sustaining or challenging facts, the practices of gaining, maintaining or deconstructing truth, as well as the instruments and media used to do so; and we have to examine the agents of knowledge, the interconnections of professions, party politics, and the different regimes of interpretation of specific groups or cultures.

Of course, as historians, we are trained to differentiate culturally diverse patterns of social interaction, to distinguish between various perspectives on reality, etc. Still, there is a significant difference between an analysis of ideologies and an approach we call a *Political*, or *Political-Historical Epistemology*: It revokes (1) clear-cut borders between *rationality* and *ideology*: there is no sphere of misinformation, manipulation and oppression as opposed to a sphere of rationality, truth, and freedom; it further revokes (2) a clear-cut border between *science* and *politics*, although it is *analytically* important to discriminate social fields with distinct habits and hierarchies or communicative systems that follow the code like power/powerlessness or true/false. If someone says, "This is a *scientific* question!", he or she might want to suspend answers that refer to political positions and request that the issue at stake be explained or discussed along the lines of its truth or falsehood — however, this request itself might follow a political agenda. Rather than taking clear and fixed borders for granted, Political Epistemology thus focuses on processes and interactions around these borders, their shifting or maybe removal (in a weak version of Political Epistemology), or even, in the strong version, regards them as political in themselves.

In this sense, Political Epistemology goes a step further than taking into account big political events like the birth of nations, world wars, or collapses of empires and their stimulating or obstructing effect on science (or, more general, on the production of knowledge). As Volker Roelcke has argued, models that separate a political from a scientific sphere and then link them again via concepts like "scientification of the social" or "science and politics as resources for each other", implicate "that there are areas of scientific practice that have

nothing to do with politics, and areas of politics that are not contaminated by the sciences." Instead, Roelcke argues, we should regard science and politics as "mutually inherent", following Foucault, Latour, and Rouse.[2] In respect to the Foucauldian nexus of knowledge and power, the role of truth regimes and discursive orders, we want to subscribe to this view. Latour's remarks on the political dimensions of scientific practices do equally inform our understanding of a Political Epistemology, especially with politics as the concern to direct attention towards specific things, and the close entanglement of knowledge and interest within actor-networks. Hence, Political Epistemology in this understanding pertains to scientific practices, but it can be prolonged into the realm of politics in a more common sense.

Now what about *epistemology*? Our approach adheres to the tradition of Fleck and Bachelard and defines 'epistemology' as *the whole system of the scientific production of knowledge*.[3] In this wider sense, the term 'epistemology' centres around scientific practices, comprises communications and interaction within a scientific collective, discursive patterns, the institutional and apparative or medial settings, preferences for research topics and objects, habits of observation, representation, and explanation, epistemic values, and the like. Thus, epistemology in this sense relates to scientific *cultures*. These obviously are inherently political, with specific power relations, social hierarchies, dominant concepts, criteria of relevance/irrelevance, and even truth regimes affiliated with the non-scientific production of knowledge in other spheres of society. And they can be set into relation to political attitudes towards scholarship, the social and political status ascribed to scholars, the resources thus granted, etc.

This understanding of epistemology is by no means unfamiliar to historians of science or knowledge — different rationalities of *scientific disciplines or fields* have been discussed widely in respect to political perspectives.[4] In the following, we relate to Political Epistemology in this wider sense. Yet it is worthwhile taking a look at 'epistemology' in the sense of the Kantian tradi-

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[2] V. R o e l c k e, *Auf der Suche nach der Politik in der Wissensproduktion: Plädoyer für eine historisch-politische Epistemologie*, "Berichte zur Wissenschaftsgeschichte" 33, 2, 2010, 176–192, see 182–3.

[3] Like most prominently B. L a t o u r, *Science in Action. How to Follow Scientists and Engineers through Society*, Cambridge 2003, and H.-J. R h e i n b e r g e r, *Toward a History of Epistemic Things: Synthesizing Proteins in the Test Tube*, Stanford 1997; *idem*, *On Historicizing Epistemology: An Essay*, Stanford 2010; *idem*, *Epistemologia historyczna*, Warsaw 2015.

[4] See, for instance, J. C o h e n - C o l e, *The Open Mind. Cold War Politics & the Sciences of Human Nature*, Chicago/London 2014; H. C r a v e n s, M. S o l o v e y (eds.) *Cold War Social Science. Knowledge Production, Liberal Democracy, and Human Nature*, Basingstoke 2014; P. E r i c k s o n *et al. How Reason Almost Lost its Mind. The Strange Career of Cold War Rationality*, Chicago/London 2013; O. H a l p e r n, *Beautiful Data. A History of Vision and Reason since 1945*, Durham/London 2014.

tion and refer to a *theory of knowledge* (Erkenntnistheorie) that asks about the *limits* and *criteria* of knowledge. Historical Epistemology in this sense attempts to historicise epistemological categories and parameters like evidence, facts, objectivity, observation — as Daston and Galison do in their work on *objectivity*, Hacking in his work on *historical meta epistemology*, or Elkana in his *anthropology of knowledge*. In this respect, a minimal definition of 'Political Epistemology' would be *a theory of knowledge, as pre-structured by political attitudes* — thus a more difference-theoretical approach that directs its attention towards the political molding of epistemic regimes, the setting of boundaries between knowledge and ignorance, the definition of legitimate sources of knowledge and evidence criteria, towards epistemic virtues, and so forth.[5]

Since Political Epistemology in this sense does not only concentrate on science, and not only on the *tacit* dimension of epistemic practices, but on *explicit formulations of, and attitudes towards knowledge*, it might at first sight be more suitable for our purpose. Here, *politics of knowledge* can be analysed and discussed in a way that easily allows them to be related to cultural/national *perspectives* or to ideologies. For instance, Elkana differentiates between two levels of thinking, with "images of knowledge" on a meta level framing (the necessary realism of) scientific practice (and its search for truth). Political Epistemology in *this* sense analyses the political structuring of these frames (these 'bounded rationalities'), which are located between an ideology and the positive body of knowledge — Elkana obviously presumes borders between rationality and ideology.[6]

Concerning the concept of a pre-structured theory of knowledge, we prefer to go back to Karl Mannheim, who claimed that all epistemology is ultimately perspective, that the constellation of terms, categories, models, levels of abstraction and ontologies — the "aspect structure" — is always related to specific, historically contingent settings. According to Mannheim, the plurality of competing versions of truth can never be reduced epistemologically. Epistemologies can never be legitimised by means of their own categories, but instead have to rely on a *narration* of their origins.[7] If aspect structures are

[5] L. D a s t o n, P. G a l i s o n, *Objectivity*, New York 2007. I. H a c k i n g, *Historical Ontology*, Cambridge 2007; Y. E l k a n a, *Anthropologie der Erkenntnis. Ein programmatischer Versuch* [1981], in: *idem*, *Anthropologie der Erkenntnis. Die Entwicklung des Wissens als episches Theater einer listigen Vernunft*, Frankfurt am Main 1986, pp. 11–122 (original: *idem*, *A Programmatic Attempt at an Anthropology of Knowledge*, in: E. M e n d e l s o h n, Y. E l - k a n a (eds.), *Sciences and cultures: anthropological and historical studies of the sciences*, Dodrecht 1981, pp. 1–76).
[6] Y. E l k a n a, *Anthropologie der Erkenntnis*, 19–22 (Y. E l k a n a, *A Programmatic*, 13–15)
[7] K. M a n n h e i m, *Ideologie und Utopie*, Frankfurt am Main 1965, p. 250. On aspect structures and truth see B. K l e e b e r g, R. S u t e r, *Doing Truth. Bausteine einer Praxeologie der Wahrheit*, "Wahrheit. Zeitschrift für Kultur-philosophie" 8, 2, 2014, pp. 211–226, here p. 225.

configured culturally and if they can never be substantiated by rational arguments, but only by narrating their origins and their respective path towards truth, it might be very fruitful to place these narrations side by side: specific and general epistemologies, hegemonic and subaltern epistemologies, present and forgotten/marginalised epistemologies.

Our special section follows the changes in political epistemologies from the beginning of the 20th century into the second half of the century. It is, however, not only history that counts, and most articles also inquire into the repercussions of specific epistemologies or choices of epistemologies for our contemporary situation, ranging from law research (Bucholc, Komornik) to the figure of French intellectuals (Petushkova). The opening article by Marta Bucholc and Maciej Komornik looks at the onset of the sociology of law in the beginning of the 20th century and the works of the Chernivtsi sociologist of positive law, Eugen Ehrlich. As they argue, the idea to turn law into an empirical discipline was followed by a handful of people opposing the established paradigm, the *Begriffsjurisprudenz*. However, by aligning with sociology, still a nascent discipline in the Germanic context, Ehrlich's "living law" research was lacking solidity in the eyes of mainstream scholarship. While law took a different path of rationalisation than the one Ehrlich proposed, and Ehrlich's became only a footnote in historical textbooks, the authors underscore that this might be the last time when an alternative political epistemology in law was possible.

Galina Babak looks at a breakthrough discussion among and against Soviet formalists in the second half of the 1920s, concentrating on Soviet-Ukrainian reactions to Boris Eikhenbaum's lectures in Kharkiv in 1926. Revolving around the concepts of "form" and "content", dispute between formalist and Marxist historians of literature already unearthed a growing trench between both approaches to how to interpret literary works. Babak, however, argues that the polemic around Eikhenbaum's articles and lectures, shows another point of dispute, namely the divergent concept of "ethics", which not only divided Marxists from formalists, but was also a disputed concept among formalists themselves.

Vedran Duančić's article delves into the rarely explored issue of science development in post-World-War-II Yugoslavia and the connection between science popularisation and the establishment of a special Yugoslav version of socialism. As Duančić explains, early science popularisation endeavours like the journal *Priroda* (Nature) not only aimed at replenishing scholarly literature, hardly available after 1945, but also propagated their own version of Marxist epistemology — which is particularly visible when compared to other journals like *Nauka i priroda* (Science and Nature). Oscillating between regarding science as an anti-fascist endeavour, a tool of Sovietsation or of discussion, and propagating a Yugoslav version of Marxism, philosophy of science was

thus involved in broader sociopolitical upheavals that shaped the newly emerging state.

Aleksei Lokhmatov's investigation of the intelligentsia discourse in Polish post-1945 social and human sciences shows how post-war sciences were entangled with debates about society. Józef Chałasiński, Wiktor Zawodziński and Stefan Kieniewicz intervened with their conceptualisation of the intelligentsia in a longstanding literary and scholarly discussion, but at the same time reconfigured them to intervene in current political discourses. According to Lokhmatov, the influence of literary and publicist traditions on social and human sciences is crucial to understanding the epistemological and conceptual decisions that shaped these disciplines and formed their own specific rationalities.

While in Lokhmatov's article 'intelligentsia' is the contested term, Daria Petushkova looks at the meandering of the concept of truth in the French tradition of intellectuals. Distinguishing between idealistic, revolutionary and specific intellectual figures, Petushkova shows how different the role of truth was in their self-identification and legitimation of their activities and engagement. Importantly, as Petushkova argues, the history of intellectuals viewed through the prism of their adherence to truth, can help us to understand the ways they have interacted with politics, respectively the ways in which they delineated themselves from such an interaction.

Another example of how politics and epistemology become intertwined is examined in Anna Echterhölter's article. Concentrating on metrological research by Witold Kula, she shows how metrology in the writings of the Polish historian changes from an auxiliary science to a central discipline for the investigation of class struggles in specific societies. For this, Kula devises a complex methodology going well beyond numismatics or classical metrology studies, looking at both the material and the symbolical. As Echterhölter shows, this approach met a widespread, even if partially selective reception by his contemporaries, but especially in recent times is experiencing a revival, also as part of the political epistemology of measurement.

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