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Introduction to Political Philosophy



(*Introducere în filosofia politică* by Adrian Miroiu, Editura Polirom, Iași, 2009, ISBN: 978-973-46-1391-5, pp. 261)

The work entitled *Introduction to Political Philosophy*, and authored by Professor Adrian Miroiu, PhD – Head of the Department of Political Sciences and European Studies within the Faculty of Political Sciences – the National School of Political and Administrative Studies – Bucharest, pertains to a series of consistent, original preoccupations and publications of the author, started in 1989, when the work *Reality and Social Practice* was published, followed by *Philosophy with no Festive Garments* (1998), *Introduction to the Analysis of Public Policies* (2001), *The Bases of Politics*, vol. I – 2006 and vol. II -2007.

In a theoretical, philosophical and historical context, where the great spirits of humankind (from Plato to H. Kelsen or from Aristotle to J. Rawls) have attempted to find solutions to issues regarding state, governance, power, authority, the functions of value landmarks, fundamental for rulers and the ruled, such as: social peace, justice, equality, common good, freedom, equity, prosperity, public order and security etc. All these being encompassed within the field of philosophy of law, the author proposes and employs a new paradigm, specific to political philosophy, without assuming an exhaustive approach to the latter. The work is centered on ‘four classic themes of political philosophy’ (p.7), namely those regarding political authority, justice, freedom and equality. The selection of these themes was not made arbitrarily; the criterion adopted by the author being that these political values are traditional, classic and, at the same time, have always played a crucial part in political life. The author specifies

that other core values and anti-values in political philosophy (e.g.: democracy, human rights, property, autocracy, dictatorship, corruption etc.) were not the object of his preoccupations in this work, although such an extension of the conceptual content and problematic is both natural and necessary.

Basing his initiative on a laborious argumentation and on the personal, creative valorization of an ample knowledge in the field, Professor A. Miroiu extracts and employs the most relevant ideas, principles and values of Political and Juridical Philosophy as they appear in present-day debates. Such are, for instance, classic theories on public power and authority, contractualist and natural right theories, classic theories regarding justice, freedom and equality etc. The comparative, historical, multidisciplinary and systemically integrated approach to the roles of values in guiding contemporary political practices is subordinated, by the author, to a clear target – that of accurately defining the content and scope of concepts, of emphasizing the reference principles for the functioning of political values in today's societies, of establishing limits and possibilities, of giving pertinent and convincing justifications to the exercise of political values in the functioning of contemporary democracies or of substantiating strategies, principles and ideas of philosophical practice, with a view to bringing about a fair society, to guaranteeing humans rights and freedoms.

The definition of political values – be they only traditional and classic, as the author proposed –, the analysis of their role with respect to what people, institutions and communities do and, especially, to what they should do in today's politically and juridically organized societies, are naturally and necessarily preceded by the formulation of a personal point of view with regard to the nature and meaning of political philosophy (in the chapter *What Is Political Philosophy?*, pp.9 -26).

The author believes that, in order to define political philosophy, one must, first and foremost, answer the question *What is politics – as a domain of society?* In political life and in its development, issues are often raised, to which positive sciences in the field (political science, political sociology, political psychology, constitutional law and political institutions, political economy, state studies, peace and conflict studies etc.) cannot find objective and verifiable answers. Such issues may be: What is the meaning of having a right? Are there any rights for national minorities? Is the government entitled to act for ensuring the exercise of these rights and, if yes, what are the limits of these actions? Is the state obliged to ensure equality and social justice among its citizens? What institutions should be created in order to ensure social or international peace? What are the

principles of social coexistence for groups of very dissimilar cultural identities? etc.

Finding solid and acceptable answers for such issues, at least on the level of the majority, presupposes adopting a specific manner of exploring and analyzing political phenomena: defining general concepts, principles and processes; explaining natural and institutional structures, as integrated in politically and juridically organized macrosystems; observing long-term evolutionary tendencies; arguing and justifying; making important decisions, in the cognitive plane, and initiating political actions, political/judicial reforms. Consequently, the philosophy of politics is a specific method of studying and knowing the structure and dynamics of political life, having two defining characteristics (pp. 12-24). The first one is focused on very general characteristics of political processes (for instance, the legitimacy of certain decisions and political actions, the achievement of social equity and justice, the assurance of an institutional state framework, meant to guarantee the rights and safety of citizens etc.). The second characteristic of political philosophy consists of it significantly being a normative / value-related approach to politics. In other words, political philosophy does not attempt to describe political phenomena but, first of all, to analyze political values, namely that which political agents should do, and not how they actually behave. Therefore, in analyses of political philosophy, judgments of existence are superimposed on those of value and, at the same time, evaluations are made according to axiological criteria. The fundamental political values in modern and postmodern societies are freedom, equality, justice, and human rights. For this reason, specific approaches to political philosophy involve interpretations, justifications, argumentations, the establishment of hierarchical values, of priorities, the emphasis of distinctions between necessity and possibility in political life, the specification of what can be done and what cannot be done.

With regard to the nature and mission of political philosophy in today's knowledge and practice, Professor A. Miroiu assumes an original position, convincingly responding to the following question:

1. What is the role of philosophical theory in the field of politics?
2. How can a principle, a norm, or a rule be established within an axiological theory?
3. What does the relation between a descriptive and a normative approach to political phenomena entail?

The author maintains that explanations and approaches in the field of political philosophy can essentially be of a deductive type – nomological, functionalistic or teleological. The establishment of principles, norms and rules can be effectuated either through a *consequentialist* approach, or

through a *deontological* one. The normative philosophical approach must be differentiated from the descriptive one. The political science must be independent of values; one cannot scientifically deduce 'what should be' from 'what is'. But this kind of measure is possible in political philosophy; in its explicative and interpretative scope, values are essentially called upon. On a philosophical level, we will not be able to logically separate political facts from values; political processes and events are charged with values; the philosopher can deduce, from these connections, the course of action that political agents should take. In this explicative context, Professor A. Miroiu expresses his conviction that philosophy provides a meta-research on political theories, a comprehensive theory on politics, responding to a natural need for conceptualization, having the political life of our contemporary society at its core.

Political philosophy is not only a theoretical, generalizing approach to political phenomena, a deductive (nomological, normative) value exegesis of politics, but also a specific philosophical practice, seeking to find new applications for theories, concepts and principles in a certain field of study (e.g.: new theories on power and legitimacy, democracy, human rights or theories of justice). Perceived as practice, political philosophy generates results in the form of the new normative theories of interactions among people in domains such as the tendency to social equalization, the process of consolidation of freedom, the creation of justice, the actual functioning of criteria and mechanisms for guaranteeing the exercise of human and citizen rights.

To conclude, Professor A. Miroiu's work, by its content of ideas, demonstrations and argumentations, by its interdisciplinary explorations, by the methodology employed and by the elegance of style, as well as by the original ideas, represents a valuable contribution to boosting the development of political philosophy and specific preoccupations in the academic world. In my opinion, such preoccupations should begin after defining the scope of political philosophy with respect to the scope of the philosophy of law, political axiology and political anthropology. The work entitled *Introduction to Political Philosophy* comprises sufficient information for conceiving and operating such delimitations.