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HOW DOES ONE UNDERSTAND
THE STABILITY OF POLITICAL REGIMES
FROM A THEORETICAL POINT OF VIEW?

ABSTRACT   The investigations of this paper revolve around the concept of stability. We would like to make several analytical distinctions which would allow us to differentiate between various concepts of stability. The background of our work is the theory of political change supported by examples of this kind presented by Plato, Polybius, James Harrington, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, and Aristotle. The paper includes some remarks on Hobbes's and Hume's theories of stability which, strictly speaking, can be smoothly subsumed under a modern political concept thereof. Also worthy of note is the specification of the main subject-matter of political theories in terms of the problem of stability. Finally, we propose a sketch of the map of the problem of stability.

Key words: stability, political theory, political change, political regimes, anacyclosis

INTRODUCTION

In this article we would like to present a plethora of problems and questions arising from the concept of stability in general and especially from political stability or the stability of political regimes. At the beginning we would like to present two distinct understandings of the concept of stability: 1) stability as a flexible system; 2) stability as invariability. Then we will precisely assign our investigations to the most appropriate discipline. The next step consists in analysing different theories of political change and making some classification thereof. Then we would like to elaborate on the core of the problem of stability and its relevance by using the example of the paradox of freedom. It is also worth mentioning the stability of political regimes and social stability as two similar but different domains. The last thread of our investigation is related to the question of whether stability is a value-free concept. To support our argument, we shall provide explanations about the roots of the republican idea and mixed regime theory. To conclude we propose a map of the problems discussed in this paper.

1. TWO CONCEPTS OF STABILITY

Let us employ a metaphor to elaborate the gist of the category of stability and stabilization. If we would like to compare and asses the stability of two objects which are dropped onto the surface of water, which of these objects would be more stable: 1) a wooden block floating on the water by striking some kind of balance or 2) a concrete brick which sinks down to the bottom and rests there without any movement? To put this question more clearly: Does stability result from proper responding to the signals from the environment, or is it related to immobility and avoiding any movement? To go further with this issue we can point out that these two approaches to stability have different definitions because, on the one hand, we can define stability as a reaction to changes, while on the other hand the concept of stability might be identical to the concept of invariability. We are more inclined to the idea that the salient feature of stability consists in flexibility rather than in invariability.

In the political dimension of this problem we deal with the stability of political regimes or, to put this issue in a broader perspective, political order. This notion is absolutely crucial for political science and political philosophy. The latter is concerned with the idea of the best regime and civic virtues which should be supported amongst citizens of a good republic. However, we would like to focus on the former discipline and especially on one of its parts – political theory. The dilemma of the bricks shall be the main subject-matter of this theorizing. There is a conspicuous discrepancy between seeing political order as a rigidly established structure and seeing it as a flexible system.

2. POLITICAL THEORY AND THE PROBLEM STABILITY

There are actually only three kinds of questions about political order we can ask: 1) What is the proper shape of a desirable order? 2) By what means can we obtain this order? 3) How can we maintain this order? Answering the first question is the task of normative theories or utopias which put forward some models of good regimes and peaceful social life. The second question is related to the theory of political *praxis*, especially to revolutionary or emancipatory ones. The third question is obviously about the stability of political regimes, which constitutes the subject-matter of our investigations. We are certain that this kind of research is the core of political theory as a scientific discipline. The discipline manifests itself in analysing and comparing sets of institutions. Joshua Cohen observed that three sorts of social criticism exist: 1) moral criticism; 2) unmasking criticism; 3) political criticism. The last consists in considering an alternative set of institutions and in trying to improve the current political system. The moment the concept of stability appears comes when Cohen mentions that the aim of political criticism is to show *what alternatives there are and how they might work as a stable set of institutions.*[1] This is further proof that stability is the main subject matter of political theory. It is worth mentioning that we should regard a political regime especially as a set of institutions. It is necessary to underline the difference between the first question and the third. Investigations about the shape of a political regime, which are typical of utopian approaches, have one main disadvantage: indolence in the face of changes. Let us take a look at Thommaso Campanella's utopia project *City of the Sun,* especially at the part depicting judging and justice at court. The author says that in the ideal city there are laws imprinted in the copper of notice boards at public places. These laws, definitions and rules of penalties are familiar to each citizen, so the task of a judge is only to demonstrate proper principles and ask an accused person to read the sentence.[2] Such a controversial topic as the case of justice is simply avoided. There is supposed to be no controversy around the question of justice or right conduct because these issues are already established for constant use. So, the conclusion is that change is the crucial issue for all political theories which take heed of political context and the reality of the political regime[3].

3. THEORIES OF POLITICAL CHANGE

Theory of political change has a great and rich tradition. The first philosopher to be concerned with change was Heraclitus of Ephesus,[4] who wrote, "Everything flows, noth-

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1   J. Cohen, "Reflections on Rousseau: Autonomy and Democracy", *Philosophy & Public Affairs*, vol. 15, no. 3 (1986), p. 297.

2   T. Campanella, *The City of the Sun*, Auckland 2009, pp. 60-61.

3   See more on this topic: Ł. Perlikowski, "Czy libertarianizm jest teorią polityczną?" in *Societas et Ius*, no. 5 (2016), pp. 85-97.

4   K.R. Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies. One Volume Edition*, Oxford 2013, pp. 10-16.

ing stands still". It means that things constantly change, hence reality is an unstoppable process. The first investigations into changes in the political dimension are to be found in Book Eight of Plato's *Republic*[5], where he describes the process of degeneration of political regimes. The transitions depicted by Plato begin with timocracy, which transforms into oligarchy, then to democracy, and this in turn ultimately degenerates into tyranny. This process is parallel to the process of the degeneration of the human psyche. The most important conclusion stemming from this theory of change is that these passages from one form to another have a necessary character. This picture of political changes is predicated upon strict connections which are supposed to be endowed with some predictive power. It is evident that these changes are very strongly determined by the tacit assumption of collapse as our final destination.

If we would like to employ the category of determination of change as our criterion of many different kinds of theories of political change, then this typology would look as follows. A less determined and not so straightforward theory is Polybius' theory of political cycles,[6] which refers to Plato's *Republic*. Its proper name is *anacyclosis* and the first stage of this process is (1) monarchy; the next stage (and here we can find the first difference between Plato's theory and that of Polybius) is (2) kingship, which means enhanced monarchy, then it transforms into (3) tyranny and the next stage is (4) aristocracy (which is actually better than tyranny), which leads us to (5) oligarchy. This in turn leads to (6) democracy and from democracy straight to (7) ochlocracy, which is the worst of political regimes, based on the rule of force and violence.[7] As we can see, in this case political reality has a more flexible character. The direction of this process is not strictly determined by the assumption of collapse and degeneration. We can find in Polybius' scheme moments of collapse and moments of improvement of the political regime – there is some logic to it, but not as determined as in Plato's theory.

The lower level of determination is the level of proportion as a main factor in predictions of political changes made by political theories. One example is James Harrington's theory[8] and another is the voice of Jean-Jacques Rousseau.[9] Harrington is well-known as the man who coined the term *suprastructure*[10] as the concept reflecting economic determinism of the political sphere. He is recognized as a forerunner of Marx's political economy. Political stability in his view is strictly related to ownership of land. As a consequence, he claims that monarchy is a regime in which one person owns at least two-thirds of the entire land, which gives him a definite advantage; an aristocracy is a regime within which a few persons have a two-thirds of all lands; democracy is

[5]   Plato, *The Republic*, vol. II, trans. P. Shorey, Cambridge Mass. 1942, pp. 234-333 [543a-569c].

[6]   Polybius*, The Histories*, vol. III, Books 5-8, trans. W. R. Paton, London 1979, pp. 271-293.

[7]   Ibid., p. 289.

[8]   J. Harrington, "A System of Politics", in idem, '*The Commonwealth of Oceana' and 'A system of Politics'*, Cambridge 1992, pp. 269-293.

[9]   J.-J. Rousseau, "The Social Contract", in J.-J. Rousseau, *Discourse on Political Economy and The Social Contract*, Oxford 1994, pp. 91-133.

[10]   J. Harrington, "A System of Politics", p. 291.

a regime where two-thirds is owned by many people[11]. Degeneration of a political regime occurs when a person claims power without owning enough land, which would be tantamount to tyranny. By analogy, we can conceptualize (in terms of land ownership) oligarchy and anarchy. It means that we can estimate the probability of the collapse of a political regime by using the criterion of ownership. Degeneration is determined not only by strict regularity or process with subsequent stages but also by some proportions, or relation between power and ownership.

Quite a similar standpoint is found in Rousseau's *Social Contract*,[12] in which he uses the quantitative criterion to estimate the stability of each kind of political regime. He writes that in democracy there are more citizens-officers than ordinary citizens; in aristocracy there are more ordinary citizens than citizens-officers and in monarchy there is only one officer or just a few of them. The normative conclusion which Rousseau highlights is that the biggest states should be ruled by a monarch, while a medium-sized state should have the form of aristocracy, and small states or cities should be democratic.[13] The change of political regime is determined by the size of political community and number of citizens. The disintegration of a state might lead to anarchy, which is worst thing that can happen to a community.[14] In sum, in Harrington's and Rousseau's approaches we are dealing with some factors influencing a political regime. This assertion can provide us with some sort of predictive power but to a limited extent and without any metaphysical claims.

The most modest approach is presented by Aristotle, who criticizes Plato's theory of political changes in Book V of *Politics*.[15] He points out that there are many different, undetermined modes of changes. There is no such thing as necessity of shifts between political forms. Aristotle asserts that we can observe the following shifts: 1) from democracy to oligarchy; 2) from one tyranny to another; 3) from tyranny to oligarchy; 4) from tyranny to democracy; 5) from tyranny to aristocracy[16]. This approach is characterised by its viewing the shifts under question as relatively undetermined, as compared to all the other approaches, and yet the former holds close to reality, giving a very accurate description thereof, in the most relevant sense. These things which we perceive as advantageous, however, are simultaneously subject to criticisms levelled by Aristotle's opponents. The most famous critic thereof is Thomas Hobbes, who recognized several weak spots in the Stagirite, for example in the assertion *that there be many things that come to pass in this world from no necessity of causes, but mere contingency, casuality, and fortune*.[17] Hence, the case of stabilization is hard to establish and political change is an untraceable process animated by contingency and uncertainty.

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[11] Ibid., pp. 270-272.

[12] J.-J. Rousseau, "The Social Contract", pp. 99-109.

[13] Ibid., p. 101.

[14] Ibid., pp. 118-120.

[15] Aristotle, *Politics*, trans. H. Rackham, Cambridge 1959, pp. 370-483.

[16] Ibid., pp. 477-483.

[17] T. Hobbes, "Behemoth: The History of the Causes of the Civil Wars of England", in idem, *The English Works of Thomas Hobbes*, vol. VI, London 1840, p. 216.

Therefore, how we should understand the notion of stability in each approach considered above? In general, stability consists in having control over changes, especially in the case of unwanted revolution or violent abuse of power. A remedy for the problem of stability in each case involves establishing an institutional framework which is intended to be sustainable. In Karl Popper's most popular work we can find an indictment against Plato's concept of the ideal state. One thread of this critique consists in analysing the reason why Plato introduced the concept in the first place. In Popper's opinion the main reason is the demand for radical stability. The ideal state project is built for the sake of maintaining the proper order and for avoiding any change. In all fairness, we have to admit that Popper's commentaries on Plato have sparked a great deal of controversy, one of which touches upon the fundamental question: what was the driving force behind Plato's writings and his priorities? The dilemma can be illustrated as follows: does the task of a group of philosophers consist in maintaining the ideal political regime (as Popper claims) or is the main purpose of a political regime to provide good conditions for philosophers? If we assume that Popper's interpretation is correct, then we should admit that stability of this kind of project is similar to that of the concrete brick from our metaphor above. We cherish the strong conviction that the less determined approach points to a more flexible solution to the problem of stability. It starts with the requirement to avoid any changes, and it finishes with the requirement to adapt to them. It may be regarded as quite a paradoxical conclusion, because more determination implies more intervention. It starts with Plato, who calls for using power to maintain political order, and finishes with Popper's call for minimal intervention, as he claims that we should face change with an attitude of full responsibility.

4. PARADOX OF FREEDOM AND THE STAKE OF STABILITY

Popper points out the core of all problems of political stability. He introduces three kinds of paradoxes[18]: 1) the paradox of freedom; 2) the paradox of tolerance; and 3) the paradox of democracy. The most general category is paradox of freedom. The very first articulation of this paradox emerges in Plato's *Republic*[19], where all democratic regimes tend to transform into tyranny because if we employ freedom as main social principle, then freedom without constraints gives rise to the collapse thereof.

The paradox of freedom is more complicated than it looks at first sight. It is related not only to absolute self-abnegation but also to the scope of possible actions of an agent. In political and legal dimensions, the best example of this perplexity is the sovereignty of parliament, or to put this more precisely: to what extent can a parliament's decisions be binding? Is a contemporary body of parliament able to forbid the actions of a subsequent parliament?[20] Can a contemporary parliament reject a decision which was made by itself?

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[18]   K.R. Popper, *The Open Society...*, pp. 581-582.

[19]   Plato, *The Republic*, pp. 303-323 [562C-565D].

[20]   On legal limitations on legislative power see: H.L.A. Hart, *The Concept of Law*, Second Edition, Oxford 1994, pp. 66-71.

This problem also raises questions of our intergenerational obligations: What do we owe to past generations? How we should guide the next generations? And what are the constrains, if any, incumbent upon us? These questions derive from the modern concept of sovereignty – especially from the scope of legislative power in the light of democratic ideals. There is for instance the refutation of pure democratic power launched by John Rawls with the resort to his idea of dualistic democracy: *Thus, constitutional democracy is dualist: it distinguishes constituent power from ordinary law of legislative bodies. Parliamentary supremacy is rejected. A supreme court fits into this idea of dualist constitutional democracy as one of the institutional devices to protect the higher law. By applying public reason the court is to prevent that law from being eroded by the legislation of transient majorities, or more likely, by organized and well-situated narrow interests skilled at getting their way.*[21] Thus, there should be some tools created for limiting and stabilizing legislative power. This power is mostly designed to manage change; and therefore, to controlling legislative power means controlling the source of changing the political regime. At this point we can mention in passing that the Rawlsian solution to the stability problem is based on the idea of public reason.[22]

5. STABILITY AND THE FETISHISM OF POLITICAL REGIME

The problem of stability is a quite well-known and popular thread in contemporary political philosophy. We can evoke for example the Rawls-Hart controversy,[23] which is focused on the question: Why it should be forbidden for society to choose less liberty instead of more welfare? Is it right to reach non-liberal goals by liberal means? In other words, we can describe the alluded positions as political-regime fetishism on the one hand and the advocacy of common good on the other. One of the first thinkers to repudiate this kind of fetishism was David Hume. As Knud Haakonsen notes: *One of Hume's most provocative contributions to this debate was his partial divorce of the question of the nature and stability of governmental action. He showed, first, that absolute monarchies like France were under certain circumstances perfectly able to adopt the rule of law and serve the public interest; and, second that "free" governments like the British one harboured forces that tended toward anarchy, and thereby tyranny and the undermining of the public interest.*[24] Hence, the stability of a particular political regime would be not

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[21] J. Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, New York 1996, p. 233.

[22] More about the idea of public reason and its role in the context of political stability: M. Rupniewski, *Prawo jako narzędzie sprawiedliwej kooperacji w społeczeństwie demokratycznym. Filozofia polityczna Johna Rawlsa z perspektywy prawniczej*, Łódź 2015, pp. 101-130; Ł. Perlikowski, "Rozum publiczny i edukacja polityczna – stabilność w koncepcji Thomasa Hobbesa", in J. Bartyzel, Ł. Perlikowski, A. Wielomski (eds.), *Wyzwanie Lewiatana. Wokół filozofii politycznej Thomasa Hobbesa*, Płock 2019, pp. 115-128.

[23] H.L.A. Hart, "Rawls on Liberty and Its Priority", *University of Chicago Law Review*, no. 40 (1973), pp. 534-555.

[24] K. Haakonsen, "The Structure of Humes' Political Theory", in D.F. Norton, J. Taylor (eds.), *Cambridge Companion to Hume*, Second Edition, Cambridge 2008, p. 362.

so significant in comparison with higher social ideals of stability, which brings us peace and freedom. What is the proper source of this kind of stability? As Hume asserts – it follows from the rules stemming from actual social practice.

The general question which we are interested in is: What sort of a change can a political regime undergo without being fundamentally transformed? Hume's answer would be that customs, social practices and tradition are supposed to impose some constraint on each political change. His view is opposite to the Hobbesian idea that stability comes from the top. Stability in Hume's political theory is always a bottom-up process. Hume's approach manifests itself most lucidly in his polemics with James Harrington. As mentioned above, this English philosopher claimed that the source of stability is located in land ownership. Hence, the engine of each political process is driven by the balance of property. Hume makes some empirical refutation of this standpoint by bringing up the historical examples of maintaining power in spite of a negative balance of property. As he states in one of his essays: *A Government may endure for several ages, though the balance of power, and the balance of property do not coincide. This chiefly happens, where any rank or order of the state has acquired a large share in property; but from the original constitution of the government, has no share in power.* [...] *But where the original constitution of the government allows any share of power, though small, to an order of men, who possess a large share of the property, it is easy for them gradually to stretch their authority, and bring the balance of power to coincide with that of property. This has been the case with the house of commons in England.*[25] Hence, according to Hume's view, social stability depends on social practices shaped by opinions of the members of society. There are two main types of such opinions, opinions of interest and opinions of right, and among the opinions of right we can distinguish the right to power and the right to property.[26] This means that the authority is supposed to exert influence on public opinion to maintain their power, and on the other hand, that public opinion can impose some constraints on the activities of government. As Friedrich von Hayek claims: [...] *in a free society in which all power rests on opinion, this ultimate power will be a power which determines nothing directly yet controls all positive power by tolerating only certain kinds of exercise of that power.*[27] In Hume's perspective there are some determinants of opinions derived from the acts of government which create the right to power. These factors are: 1) long possession of power; 2) present possession of power; 3) conquest; 4) succession; 5) positive laws that regulate who should hold power.[28] Therefore, an opinion may be a factor which supports power or constitutes a cause of its collapse. From Hume's perspective the most proper way of shaping these opinions are customs, social practices and social recognition of legitimate power. It means that

[25]   D. Hume, "The First Principles of Government", in idem, *Essays. Moral, Political, and Literary*, Indianapolis 1987, p. 35.

[26]   Ibid., p. 33.

[27]   F.A. von Hayek, *Law, Legislation and Liberty*, vol. I *Rules and Order*, London 1973, p. 93.

[28]   D. Hume, "A Treatise of Human Nature", in idem, *The Essential Philosophical Works*, Ware Hertfordshire 2011, pp. 481-487.

his approach is close to our example of the wooden block as a metaphor for a flexible attitude towards stability. This kind of evolutionary conservatism is characterized by adopting the changes and modifying sets of rules according to the demands of social reality. A more radical standpoint was expressed by Hobbes in his investigations into the role of opinions in the social and political life of a community. As Robert Kraynak puts it: *The conclusion of Hobbes's historical writings, therefore, is that civilization has been characterized by the establishment of authoritative opinions and the disputation of these opinions, rendering it not merely unstable but positively self-destructive.*[29] We have to admit that Hobbes is more devoted to the concept of stability related to stable political order managed by a sovereign ruler whose main task is stabilization. Hume's perspective is broader, as he shows that the most relevant level of stability is the social one. A stable community understood as an assembly of people cooperating with respect to the set of some rules of justice is not necessarily linked to or determined by the assumption of a political regime.

6. STABILITY AS VALUE

Another question is whether stability is a value-free concept. Our hypothesis is that there is some hidden preference towards political projects which exhibit such a level of complexity that they merit the label of mechanism. For every object which is not such a mechanism the notion of stability cannot apply. If there are, however, more elements or more parts to a political regime, then stability is a regulative norm for the functioning thereof. The reason is that some regimes are more liable to change. If there is an absolute monarch on whom all state issues depend, it is easier to change an entire political regime of this sort than to change a republican mixed regime where several parts of the political body influence each other and thus restrict potential changes. Therefore, the answer is that the notion of political stability leans towards substantive political regimes. We can suppose that from such a perspective monarchy is worse than aristocracy, aristocracy is worse than democracy, and democracy is worse than mixed regime. The hidden principle is a demand for as many bodies as possible to participate in power. To put this assertion as lucidly as possible: if a number of parts of a given mechanism is large, then the change thereof faces potential failure of its system. If, on the other hand, there are fewer elements to the mechanism or its character is more homogenous, then change is easier to implement.

This problem is strictly related to another, of a historical nature. Is there any essential difference between the classical and modern versions of the problem of stability? It seems to be obvious that in the modern era the problem of stability is crucial for each political theory and political practice. In spite of numerous similarities, the most important game-changer was the appearance of the modern idea of sovereignty. It starts with

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[29] R.P. Kraynak, "Hobbes's *Behemoth* and the Argument for Absolutism", in *The American Political Science Review*, vol. 76 (1982), p. 841.

Hobbes, who emphasized the voluntary aspect of ruling. It means that medieval monarchies were regarded as organisms consisting in unity of the king and community. The main field of the king's activities was judicial power, where customs were identified with the source of law. In the modern era, the main issue of authority is legislative power[30]. The modern ruler must permanently prove their authority by creating the law and stabilizing the community, which is the proper subject of their will. At this point let us emphasize that the classical view on political issues is based on the unity of community, and the modern view brings us the separation of powers. Significant to this investigation is the meaning of *res publica*. This notion has a broad meaning because it not only designates a particular form of government; *res publica* can assume any form of regime – it may be either monarchical or non-monarchical. A republic in this sense is identified with the state, which is in the possession of all the members thereof. Hence, we can claim that the Roman Empire was a republic just as medieval monarchies were. Even when Jean Bodin tried to elaborate the notion of sovereignty, he labelled his considerations as *Six Books of the Commonwealth*[31]; however, he was apologetic of the absolute monarchy. Apart from the republic *sensu largo* (*res publica*) we deal with the notion of republic *sensu stricto*, which is crucial for the modern idea of state. In this sense, the republic is recognised as a particular form of political regime and its core is the idea of mixed regime. This ambiguity of meaning of the concept of 'republic' is caused by a language shift. In traditional Latin there is no appropriate word for 'state' as we understand this term in modern and contemporary political thought. So, the conclusion is that in the classical paradigm they resorted to the broad meaning of 'republic', denoting several kinds of regimes, but in the modern paradigm it becomes too narrow a framework based on understanding 'republic' as a concrete political regime focused on the idea of mixed regime.

The logic of a mixed regime is the same in each doctrine; that is, the aim is to maintain an order which would be foreseeable and fully immune to the challenge of changes. This form of government makes people more confident in the state issues. People then recognize the rule of law as a rule of law created by themselves, which comes close to self-governance. As Aquinas had argued for mixed regime: […] *the best manner of constituting the ruling offices occurs in a city or region in which (a) there is a single person who is placed in authority on the basis of virtue (*secundum virtutem*) and presides over everyone, and in which (b) under him there are certain others who govern in accord with virtue, and yet in which (c) this political arrangement involves everyone (*ad omnes pertinet*), both because the rulers can be chosen from among everyone and because they are chosen by everyone. This is the best political arrangement, with a good mixture of (a) monarchy, insofar as there is a single preeminent ruler, and (b) aristocracy, insofar as many govern in accord with virtue, and (c) democracy, i.e., rule by the people, insofar as the rulers can be chosen from among the people and the choice of rulers falls to the people (*ad populum pertinet electio principium*).*[32] This is the most straightforward way to attain peace and avoid

[30]   F.A. von Hayek, *Law, Legislation and Liberty*, pp. 124-144.

[31]   J. Bodin, *Six Books of the Commonwealth*, trans. R. Knolles, London 1903.

[32]   St. Thomas Aquinas, *Treatise on Law*, trans. A. J. Freddoso, South Bend 2009, ST part. I, II, 105.

rebellion, because every attempt to rebel against the authority should be recognized as an assault on the entire body of a community. Revolutionary changes which would come to the community from outside would be automatically rejected as unwanted interference and changes having their roots within the community would be treated as a disease eligible for treatment (e.g. Aquinas on capital punishment: ST II–II, q. 25).

All the above-mentioned facts have inclined us to conclude that stability is not a value-free concept, but it has a substantive content which is identified with concrete political proposals for a community. It depends on the concept of *res publica* in the broader meaning as well as in the narrow sense of republic as a political regime. To put it more clearly: stability is not just a formal demand but also a substantive ingredient of political doctrine – when I argue for a stable government of a stable political order I always argue for a specific set of institutions which are involved in the mechanism of politics.

7. CONCLUSIONS

Modern political science recognized as a fully-fledged discipline can be identified with the science of stability. This became most obvious with the instance of legal and political projects of the American regime prepared by the authors of *The Federalist Papers*,[33] who have identified stability as the main political concept and the main task of political theory. The result of their efforts is one of the most efficient political regimes, based on assumptions of checks and balances. To take it for granted that political science is strictly determined by the concept of stability we should pay special attention to the complexity of this problem.

The crucial issue of stability is to recognize our situation and choose the proper attitude toward the factors which we have to face. The situation is concerned with what matters in our political and social landscape and what is the proper source of changes. The second step consists in forecasting or establishing the direction of changes – what are the possible ways in which reforms can proceed? And the third is our political decision: what do we actually want to do with these changes: avoid, adopt, reverse, or accelerate them? From these fundamental positions we can derive all possible political standpoints.

We would like to conclude that both visions of stability have their respective justifications and might prove appropriate to different projects or be squared to different needs. We also claim that stability as a substantive political concept might be considered a utopian ideal. Absolute stability is impossible to achieve, and attempts to reach it lead to harmful effects. These attempts are common within the constructivist paradigm, which is criticized by von Hayek, who is opposed to constructivist rationalism and argues for critical rationalism[34] (represented by e.g. Popper). The main fault of the

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[33]   A. Hamilton, J. Madison, J. Jay, *The Federalist Papers*, New York 2008.; M. Hardt, A. Negri, *Empire*, Cambridge Mass. 2000, pp. 160-182.

[34]   F. A. von Hayek, *Law, Legislation and Liberty*, pp. 8-34.

constructivist position is interfering with solutions following from evolution of social practices based on experience.

The most appropriate view of the problem of stability, we believe, is presented by David Hume. The argumentation of all evolutionary conservatism in this field is widely developed because change is its main subject-matter. There is no place here to expand this thread, but we would like just to signal that this standpoint is strongly ingrained in the experience of social life.

To recapitulate, we would like to repeat that the concept of stability has two distinct aspects, flexibility and invariability. Stability is strictly related to the assumptions about the destinations of political changes and the phases of their process. We have also argued that more complications within the set of political institutions establish good grounds for applying the concept of stability, and if we would like to make assessments employing this criterion, we need to bear in mind that there are some hidden preferences connected therewith. Finally, we have to underline that the topic investigated above is unavoidable for political science if we are to agree with Marcus Aurelius that "The world is a continual change, life is opinion".[35]

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