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IDENTITY OF POLITICAL PLAYERS IN GAME THEORY

ABSTRACT   The process of modelling political phenomena, subject to the methodological principles of science, creates problems at various levels of reconstructing reality. The problems result from the application of these principles in isolation from the basic goal, which is the adequacy of the model in relation to real phenomena. This adequacy is considered primarily from the point of view of the possibility of explaining the observed phenomena. The presented analysis concerns the problem of assumptions made in relation to players in game theory and their relation to the social world, but first of all, from the point of view of the relationship between subjectivity, identity and the ability to make decisions by political players based on the semantic interpretation of the world of politics.

Keywords: identity, political strategies, games, models, political semantics

The process of modelling social phenomena is based on rules or principles that result from two basic sources. The first one is the analysed phenomenon itself and its constitutive element, which is our understanding of the observable regularities occurring in a separate social situation. The concept of understanding, in turn, together with the category of observation, refers to the possible relations between phenomena and the researcher (observer), which we can analyse at the level of the mind and its functional skills – in particular, those related to the representation of the behaviour of oneself and other actors, which are attributes of each participant in social interactions.[1]

The second source are the models already existing in science, which we can confront with our understanding of social phenomena, in this case – the game theory. The combination of these two planes creates a level that mainly has meta-analytical features, and which allows us to conduct theoretical research aimed at constructing an explanatory model of a given phenomenon that optimizes the relationship between the model and what is observed. The above relation is of a pragmatic nature, constituted within the framework of the existing research practice, which treats models as a kind of tool that serves the development of explanatory knowledge, but also modifies the models themselves depending on the regularities that occur in a given research context.[2] Therefore, the above approach abstracts from the problem of the adequacy of the model in relation to reality, if such adequacy were to denote a type of representation of a given phenomenon, the source of which is observation (naively understood perception). On the other hand, it refers to the similarities of a structural nature, which are a derivative of our ability to idealize and represent phenomena in the form of cognitive schemas, which in turn are characterized by a specific logic.[3]

We can now specify the generally defined cognitive space using more precisely expressed assumptions. Therefore, we may assume that game is a representation of reality and from this point of view, on the analytical level, reality is in some aspect a game. As with any model of reality, it determines the features (interpretation within the model) of the elements of the world and the nature of interactions between them. Relations and features, in turn, are constituted by the dynamics assumed within that model. In each model of a game, its dynamics is determined by the decisions and choices of players (sometimes only nominal ones), and these decisions construct the game in such a way that allows the user of this model to assess the player's situation. The model, which is only a formal structure, allows reconstructing situational relationships on a general level. In other words, it captures their common features from various situations, which

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[1]   See A. Clark, *Being There: Putting Brain, Body, and World Together Again*, Cambridge 1997; A. Rosenberg, *Philosophy of Social Science*, Boulder, CO 2008, pp. 171 and other.

[2]   An updated overview of the development of game theory can be found in: *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, at <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/game-theory/>.

[3]   See G. Lakoff, M. Johnson, *Philosophy in the Flesh. The Embodied Mind and its Challenge to Western Thought*, New York 1999; G. Lakoff, *The Political Mind*, New York 2008; M.B. Hesse, *Models and Analogies in Science*, Indiana 1966.

constitute the features of the model itself. In this sense it is a theoretical tool that can itself evolve within the rules of action that we have established within it.

The game model used in social sciences assumes the existence of actors understood as active elements of the game. Depending on the interpretation, we can assign the actors full subjectivity in the classical sense, in which the choice (decision) is the result of rational reflection (the hierarchy of preferences following the rules of logic), or we can weaken this assumption by assuming that actors also act on a sub-personal (unconscious) level.[4] The minimum assumption that we must make is that the actors in the presented model are characterized as intentional systems: they strive for something based on their understanding of the situation by reading and interpreting *meanings*. Intentionality, under certain assumptions, can be identified with the mind (the case of the intentional system). Because, regardless of the differences in terms of these categories, the mind (in the basic functional sense) is a disposition to represent reasons in the form of *meanings* and the basic quality of meaning is *being about something*.

Some intentional states, understood as representing the features of the situation, can be interpreted using an additional criterion, i.e. the criterion of rationality. In games, the problem of rationality relates to the notion of strategy and its choice, but at a more basic level it relates to the difference between meaning and truth, i.e., meaning that meets additional criteria. The concept of truth interpreted pragmatically is directly related to the strategy which, as a result of testing, turns out to be effective in some way. The problem of the equivalence of effectiveness (instrumentalism) and truthfulness (adequate explanation) in knowledge systems such as science is important due to the goal one wants to achieve within such a system. If science is a kind of *a game with nature*, then its misreading it leads to failure. The nature of the world may be hidden from us in some way, but it does not hide from us intentionally, that is, it does not use a specific, default strategy towards us. Nature does not deceive itself about what it is or what it is not, either. This poetic, anthropomorphizing digression about nature is quite appropriate here because it allows us to see the difference between the non-intentional system and the intentional system.[5] Most likely, only the human mind can make an actor, that is, an *intentional agent,* out of nature. The world is also right about itself and about the rules by which it should act, and in this sense it does not make mistakes. In other words, it has no problem with its own identity and decision criteria because it is only a certain *some-thing* but is not *any-one*, even if it is an evolving system.

The category of identity, which in many systems of knowledge, including logic, states a certain obvious but abstract fact that a given x is identical to itself, is a simplification (which is difficult to maintain) in relation to social and political actors. At the social level, it is most likely maintained due to the effectiveness or lack thereof, like in bureaucratic systems in which a person is identified with a set of handy parameters. The

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[4]   D.C. Dennett, "Intentional Systems in Cognitive Ethology: The 'Panglossian Paradigm' Defended", *The Behavioural and Brain Sciences*, vol. 6 (1983), pp. 343-390; Idem, *The Intentional Stance*, Cambridge 1987.

[5]   Idem, *Darwin's Dangerous Idea: Evolution and the Meanings of Life*, New York 2014, ch. 13, 14.

set of these parameters determines *what* we are, but says nothing about *who* we are. To some extent, the humanities have a similar goal, i.e. an attempt to determine what we are – for example, a set of coded or learned algorithms that guarantee the repeatability of our behaviour. The social level of behaviour analysis is obviously closer to their biological foundations (determinants), hence the determination of such a closed pattern of behaviour is possible, also due to the objective perspective resulting from the methodology which ignores the subjective aspect of the social world. Hence, for example, in evolutionary games, an actor is identified with the chosen strategy because it facilitates the statistical analysis of behaviour in nature.[6]

The general modifier that changes our cognitive situation in science is the level of culture coupled with the symbolic and linguistic level of thinking and self-reflection. It is within the framework of the latter that a person recognizes themselves as an individual subject with their own identity, which, in the general cognitive structure, also resulting from language (grammatical subject), allows them to *be someone*. A preliminary outline that would bring us closer to understanding the phenomenon of identity should take into account the general structure of the situation in which it may appear as a cognitive problem, both for the subject and for the researcher. In other words, it must take into account the fact of its relational nature in relation to the general characteristics of the human condition. The concept of the game, which has well-recognized cultural roots, is also a consequence of the human experience of being in the world, which is to some extent a determinant for our sense of individuality – also against the obvious features of social life, which define our status as species. The political level, in turn, is the domain of action in which the relationship between identity and behaviour becomes even more arbitrary. We can fairly consistently analyse the social structure and therefore social identities from a purely functional perspective. Politics, on the other hand, has an aspect of historicity, which is essentially the same as being random or unique. Here, of course, we will look at the issue in the narrow scope relating to identities of political players. The concept of history is easily scalable and can refer to both individual and collective history. We could even take as probable the hypothesis that this procedure is possible because of the explicit or implicit role of the narrator in the story. They are the *centre of gravity*, thanks to which talking about the identity of such complex phenomena or processes seems to make some cognitive sense.[7] But also, they are the source of the narrative error, consisting in the assumption that everything that happened in the past led to a specific end known to the narrator.[8] The teleological character of history is a subjective illusion resulting from taking a central point, usually in the form of "I," as the ultimate cognitive perspective.

Narrowing the field of our analysis, in the next step we may assume that identities of players are determined by the meanings they assign to each other within political

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[6]   J. Hofbauer, K. Sigmund, *Evolutionary Games and Population Dynamics*, Cambridge 1998, pp. 57 and other.

[7]   See D.C. Dennett, *Intuition Pumps and Other Tools for Thinking*, London–New York 2014, ch. VII.

[8]   D. Kahneman, *Thinking, Fast and Slow*, New York 2013, pp. 156 and other.

games. Furthermore, we assume that the identity of political players is constituted at the level of culture, which we understand here as a sort of semantic map in which the human species determines its meaning for itself. This is only one dimension of culture which, of course, does not exhaust the nature of this phenomenon. In this perspective, we can compare or juxtapose different meanings that define our identity beyond its biological aspect, i.e. we can speak of cultural differences.

The assumption regarding the functioning of actors within the boundaries of a semantic map results in two important things: the identity of political players consists of relatively constant features of a given culture and meanings that result from activities undertaken within its framework. Both can be considered within the framework of historical narrative on various scales, that is, from world history to autobiography. The perspective of the game model, on the other hand, imposes a different character onto the explanations than the above-mentioned historical narrative. The narrative is a structure emerging *post factum* and in this sense it does not bring anything essential to the understanding of the game, because it itself does not define the rules of the game (i.e. it does not reconstruct them). An inherent feature of the game as a model of behaviour is the set of decision possibilities it contains, which are analysed by both political actors and observers of political phenomena. The game model captures what is most important from the point of view of human subjectivity, that is, making decisions in conditions characterized primarily by uncertainty and risk. If the latter is distinguished by quantitative (computable) parameters, then we are left with uncertainty as an essential existential feature of the players' situation.

Before we come to this model of the *game of meaning*, let us briefly recall the general model of games. As we stated earlier, the model is a representation of reality, and in this case the game model is a representation of political practice, with a distinguished element in the form of strategic behaviour. Strategic behaviour or the use of strategies is nothing else than achieving one's own goals in a situation where in achieving them one must take into account the goals (intentions, interests) of other players. This is the basic idea behind the game. Just for the sake of order, let us note that in mathematical models of the game it is represented in the form of matrices or graphs, where the first representation corresponds to synchronous games and the second to sequential games. Synchronicity is an assumption that would be difficult to maintain in relation to real situations, but it allows analysing the game as a scoreboard (matrix) that the players know, and therefore in this case we can speak of the so-called full knowledge (information) of the players. The choice of strategy in this case is obvious and calculable, and the strategy itself boils down to choosing the optimum. Sequential games are based on the notion that the players do not know their choices (sequences), hence, at individual stages of the game, one cannot talk about the full information of the players. Players refer to their own hierarchies of preferences, which are nothing more than a projection of results, hence a rational player is the one who achieves their optimal maximum and does not show self-destructive tendencies. At the basic level, the problem with such a model is the assumption of full knowledge, which in the case of mathematics is a priori knowledge. The relationship between the results described by a function has a tautological

character and hence the choice of strategy becomes obvious. What, if any sense of the concept of *choice* remains will be left aside for now.

This general outline is necessary for us to draw attention to the implications of mathematical generalization regarding games for the understanding of the concept of strategy, a player and their choices. No matter how advanced mathematical tools that we use are, the above concepts lose any meaning from a pragmatic perspective, since they are reduced to the nominal meaning of the place of writing. From the pragmatic perspective, all these three concepts are related to the structure of the subject, its understanding at the general level (reflection and the ability to choose) and the historical location (the context of time and space). Of course, we can always reverse the perspective and show that game theory in its mathematical form correlates with real situations under certain idealisational assumptions. This does not change the fact that they reduce the subject to an abstract player characterized by a computational type of rationality. The adequacy of these two elements of the game assumes their immutability, thanks to which the political actor is represented by a hierarchy of preferences that meets the requirements of logic, in particular the requirement of transitivity of relations between options to choose from.

The colloquial image of a human being (sometimes called naive auto-anthropology) stands in stark contrast not only to such a vision of a player, but also the image of a human created on the basis of empirical social sciences. From the point of view of our analysis, the optimal perspective (in terms of scope and significance) for presenting the problem of disproportions between these representations is the perspective of the player's mind entangled in a number of cognitive contexts. The main feature that the game model has to deal with is its subjectivity, which is not only a problem for the methodology of science, but is an essential feature that characterizes social and political games. If we were looking for an analogy for a possible solution to this problem, we could point such conventional games as chess or go, in which the human mind has been defeated by a computational process in the form of software. However, the case of conventional games shows that such an objectification of a chess player's mind is possible because chess is played according to well-known rules.

The problem of subjectivity is therefore a cognitive problem in any attempt to objectify social interactions, because the human mind has so far eluded its own representation with codified rules. What is more, in comparison with conventional games, we can easily see the difference between the situation of a political player and the situation of a chess player, which is defined by the chessboard. The convention of the game is the most important part, even if we recognize that a chess player's mind differs from a computer in that during the game they have to deal with other influences, such as their own emotions. The notion of rules, however, is useful for understanding games and the role of rules in predicting the behaviour of players, including the *behaviour* of the computer. As regards social conventions, the problem lies in both their scope and origin as well as validity. With regard to political games, the situation becomes even more complicated because politics, although historically subjected to various processes of ritualization, is essentially a game of uncertainty. Codifications of political games are rather persuasive

and normative, i.e. they would require the existence of a final authority that could enforce them. Apart from mythical references to the hypostasis of history and metaphysical beings, the human mind has brought nothing important here.

The game model would have to solve yet another problem that does not belong to the field of social sciences, but is the problem of every participant in political games. The source of this problem is not the lack of an adequate model of the human mind (which is the problem of psychology), but the impossibility to apply it in political practice, as the application of this model would require the existence of a competent enforcer. Who this competent enforcer is, is an issue that directly relates to the problem of identity on a general level. His purely hypothetical competences, which we can briefly define as the ability to simulate the successive stages of the game, thanks to the ability to simulate the mental states of other players, are equally general. This competence is similar to knowing the matrix of game scores, in which individual moves are the result of a calculation process. Moreover, the social and political world would have to consist only of such perfect (?) minds. In other words, some ideas that serve to explain human behaviour lead us to the conclusion that in this case the object of explanation does not meet the conditions of optimal explanation and we should change its nature (identity).

The justification for making this type of speculation are attempts to understand and build management systems, including political institutions as super players with an abstract identity, as well as bureaucratic systems, understood as beings of higher intelligence (rational in Weberian understanding), and therefore entitled to exercise actual power in political systems. Moreover, the idea of reading minds (the intentional system) is not unrelated to the competences of the human mind, understood as the effects of biological and cultural evolution. One of its basic functions is to simulate (read) the intentions of other social players, because in any social environment the implementation of one's own goals must take into account the intentions of others at a given time. Time is crucial here because it also determines the possibility or impossibility of using other tools and information sources beyond the natural competence.[9] The second key factor that is important both at the system level and at the level of the individual mind is the nature of the information we have at our disposal. Here we return to the subjectivity of the mind in its other aspect, as represented by a semantic interpreter. Information in quantitative interpretation dominates in all created systems. Even if we consider the processes taking place in the brain to be computational in nature, at the subjective level of the mind we encounter a phenomenal qualitative world of the subject. It is the basis of the entire range of our behaviours, which we analyse within the framework of popular psychology. Information of a semantic nature is a type of information that is at the disposal of the subject themselves, including their self-understanding, is based on and results from the world of meanings – starting from the individual level, through group, social and national identities. Also, the concept of

9   V.S. Ramachandran, *The Tell-Tale Brain. A Neuroscientist's Quest for What Makes Us Human*, New York 2012; G. Hickok, *The Myth of Mirror Neurons. The Real Neuroscience of Communication and Cognition*, New York 2014.

man within this world has primarily a cultural meaning, which can only to some extent coincide with scientific knowledge (we can try to think of ourselves as a survival machine, serving our selfish genes).

As mentioned earlier, politics, or at least one of its most important aspects, is a cultural phenomenon. In the above context, this means that political players gain their importance within culture (such as ideas, symbols, institutions, or biography) in two ways. The first one, which is exclusively semantic (meaning), defines them with specific characteristics, from social status to political position (ideas). In the second sense, political players are defined by their place in the structure of the political game (significance), which is related to the idea of importance and weighting in the game.

We may gain a new analytical dimension if we look at this location of politics in the perspective of the game model. First of all, let us note that the basic sense of the idea of the game comes down to the nature of our behaviour in the environment, which is naturally given to us, e.g., by being a social species. Therefore, in spite of what critics say, game is not a state we choose, but a state in which we exist out of necessity. In this case, we define the nature of our behaviour by using the category of strategy, purposeful action, i.e. action aimed at achieving a result in a complex social environment. Evolutionary psychology tells us that there is no radical gap between us and other species from the point of view of the two features of the world that interest us here. The first one is the phenomenon of the mind and its relationship to behaviour, and the second is the phenomenon of culture, which at the most basic level is related to the ability of social learning and imparting competences.[10] In terms of both of these features, the situation is quite radically changed by having a language and other symbolic means of representing knowledge and information. It gives our consciousness and thinking a recursive character, and makes the transmission of knowledge independent of time. Language also changes the nature of our social and cultural games as it allows us to represent both the past and the future. We shall now leave aside the matter whether and to what extent it does it adequately. The recursive nature of thinking allows for the analysis and selection of one's own strategies and a critical assessment of the means used in the game, and any symbolic system may become the playing field, regardless of how it relates to reality. The extent of possible games is very wide, because it includes both institutions such as the stock exchange or the parliament, but also refers to national narratives.

The basic question that we can ask about strategic behaviour is the question of the choice of measures within the generally understood strategy and whether its application creates regularities that are noticeable at the observation level. If we treat strategy as a general structure, a kind of syntax of behaviour, then we still have to answer the question about the content of behaviour, and therefore about the content of the game. The obvious consequence of accepting such a syntax of behaviour is the assumption that the content appears in a relationship and for the intended purpose of the game.

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[10] M. Tomasello, *The Cultural Origins of Human Cognition,* Cambridge 2009; F. de Wall, *Are We Smart Enough to Know How Smart Animals Are?*, New York 2016; C. Gamble, J. Gowlett, R. Dunbar, *Thinking Big: How the Evolution of Social Life Shaped the Human Mind*, London 2014.

The meaning of this content may change even due to our position in the structure of the game. Each of the political player's movements can be assessed both from the point of view of efficiency (the possibility of achieving the assumed goal) and from the more illusory, content-related (meaning) aspect of their choice.

Now let us introduce some reservations that will allow us to make another move in this analysis. In the game interpreted in this way, we can only consider hierarchies of preferences based on the ranks assigned to them by players (*ordinal utility* vs *cardinal utility*).[11] This means that assigning any numerical values to them only has a certain heuristic value. We can speculate under what conditions it would be possible to analyse cultural behaviour from the point of view of the survival of that culture, that is, apply a research strategy analogous to that in evolution games, but this level of complexity is beyond the scope of the model. However, attempts to model history are still being made. The second objection concerns quasi transitive relation, which in the cultural context is further blurred.[12] Preferences in relation to options and the relationships between them continue to be valid as each political player makes such distinctions. Moreover, the transitivity of the relation loses so much importance in social practice, because it is dominated by two-valued assessments. Duality is one of the dominant features of our thinking, ranging from the social division into *us* and *them*, the political one into *enemies* and *friends*, through *truth* and *lie*, to end with the ethical division into *good* and *evil*. Multi-valued logics are apparently so counter-intuitive, that they cannot break through to social consciousness.

The rule for evaluating strategy in such two-valued rankings can be effective in many ways, even if, as a consequence of its application, extremely complex systems are formed.[13] On a general level, we should remember that the hierarchy of preferences, even in this form, represents only the formal aspect of the game, in which, however, the most important are the meanings (content). The identity of the players at the cultural level is the result of their choices, but it is not the same as the formal structure of strategy. Not every reader of the *Prince* will become an eminent statesman although political instrumentalism described by Machiavelli may seem surprisingly simple, just as not every follower of Machiavelli will become an outstanding theorist of political power. Apparently, we can only understand this difference by analogy, because there is no evidence that a specific strategy is impossible to implement. In order to understand the difficulty of identifying and evaluating someone's actions, one should also take into account contemporary semantics, which also considers the theory of behaviour.[14] Ultimately, the identification of an action is nothing more than assigning a meaning to it,

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[11] W.E. Block, R. Wutscher, "Ordinal or Cardinal Utility: A Note", *Studia Humana*, vol. 3, no. 1 (2014), pp. 27-37.

[12] See A. Sen, "Quasi-Transitivity, Rational Choice and Collective Decisions", *Review of Economic Studies*, vol. 36, no. 3 (1969), pp. 381-393.

[13] Games of life are an example of a game whose evolution based on simple rules creates complex systems. See K. Sigmund, *Games of Life: Explorations in Ecology, Evolution, and Behaviour*, Mineola 2017.

[14] See A.R. Mele (ed.), *The Philosophy of Action*, Oxford 1997.

which by its nature tends to be opaque and susceptible to various interpretations (thesis about indeterminate meaning).[15]

Let us try to show this problem by analysing the political game as a kind of status game in which certain identities are equivalent to winning the game. The overall structure of the game is defined by the vertical dimension of our imagination, and it is an example of an overriding sense which we cannot avoid, since status means going up or down.[16] As in any other game, the result is determined not only by the individual potential of the player, but also by the possibilities (game patterns) that result from the moves of all other participants in the game. The second general feature of the status game is the assumption, known from game theory, is that strategies may be of cooperative and non-cooperative character, with the entire spectrum of possibilities from full conflict to full cooperation. The extremes here are only certain idealizations that in the real world can only occur at the level of conventional settlements.

We may assume that the dynamics of the status game depends on three main notions, once specified by Thomas Hobbes, i.e. the desire of fame, rivalry and distrust. Status, however, is equivalent to the position of power, that is, the higher the status someone achieves, the more power they gain. These motivations are related in many ways, both on the level of meaning itself and its behavioural correlation. That is, between the behaviour of political players and their understanding of the *meaning* of particular motives there is a relationship that we can consider to be *quasi*-causal. However, we can predefine *fame* as being known by the maximum number of players. In this sense, fame has a quantitative dimension, which translates into the ability to influence the behaviour of others. Fame also has another, very pragmatic dimension, i.e. it determines the ability to attract attention. Social attention is a commodity of the highest importance for the position, i.e. status, because it determines to some extent the structure of the game, by engaging the cognitive resources of other players onto a specific person, and distracting them from other players (in other words, it reduces the participants' ability to perceive other possibilities).

Competition is an obvious consequence of the existence of the social environment, again in its elementary quantitative dimension. We shall not focus here on biological foundations for differentiating people, it is enough for us to note the rule that distinguishing ourselves from others is the basis for appearing as an individual in the social space, because it is something that survival at the level of social perception depends on. It is always based on noticing differences (an example from the borderline of biology and culture are faces – which are always perceived as human, even if we evaluate them as non-human). Of course, purely social games are characterized by an emphasis on conformism, but such are the consequences of group dynamics. In the sense that is the most important from the point of view of our analysis, competition is a struggle for the level of social attention (through various means), because only in this way do actors

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[15]   See J.A. Fodor, *The Elm and the Expert: Mentalese and Its Semantics*, Cambridge 1994.

[16]   This is an example of meaning that results from the metaphorical origin of the concepts, see G. Lakoff, M. Johnson, *Philosophy…*

gain a chance for their own identity. Earlier, we characterized it primarily from the classical, first-person point of view, which we can also present as a phenomenon appearing within the framework of internal perception. This is possible thanks to reflection, i.e. the recursive structure of thinking that we usually describe using the metaphor of a mirror. Individuals are the heroes of their own stories (autobiographies) because the human *I*, interpreted as the *subject* and *narrator* tells stories about *themself*. Developing this aspect would require a far-reaching analysis, but for our purposes it is enough to emphasize the link between this experience and its coupling with individual and collective memory. Identity is a function of memory that we simplify as the past tense in our game structure.

Competition creates an environment in which distrust is in turn an attitude related to the future of the game and the position of each player, which is generally characterized by the category of uncertainty. In the interpretation of a qualitative political game, the parameters of the players' situation and the distinction between uncertainty and risk may even play a role, but let us emphasize again that this is the perspective of the researcher of the game and not of the most of its participants. The researcher becomes an expert on the game in the situation of electoral analysis and the characteristics of the future in terms of probability. However, the necessary condition for such an analysis is the existence of an institution of elections and the flow of reliable information. From this point of view, we can rather note the importance of individual institutions for the course of the political game. From the perspective of each player, the most important information is that which is useful from the point of view of their strategy. This is what determines the probable transitions between the present and the future, and precisely the state which is desired from the player's point of view. Distrust determines the relationship between players and, depending on the reaction time of the parties, determines the course of the game from the level of emotions to the planned behavioural strategies.

In the perspective that is of interest to us, we consider culture as an open system of fixed meanings (stereotypisation of meaning), which to some extent determines the conditions of the game of status.[17] In this sense, culture is a frame of reference in the game of status, creating a space for competition in which political players position themselves in relation to each other. From this point of view, the political aspect of culture or social space is not a space for communication, because communication within it also becomes a means of a game, not a tool of communication. Conflict is permanently inscribed in the structure of political phenomena, because only a situation of conflict is the starting point for changing the status of players. Political institutions, together with the political ideas that constitute their raison d'être, are undoubtedly the most important frame of reference for political behaviour. But their hierarchy only has a symbolic meaning that can be read in various ways. The durability of actual institutions is an appearance, because we judge it on the basis of the existence of the groups that represent

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[17]   Culture can act like *choreographer* in games. See H. Gintis, *The Bounds of Reason: Game Theory and the Unification of the Behavioral Sciences*, Princeton 2014, pp. 148 and other.

them and use them to define their own status. The persistence of status (the game for maintaining status) is therefore the only foundation of institutions.

It would be justified here to distinguish between social and political institutions. The first are generated by functionally interpreted social needs. Therefore, the status associated with them stems from the requirement of real competences, which fall under other verification criteria. The criteria in force here are not as obvious as we might wish, and as in the case of political institutions, we often deal with a game of appearances in which nominal achievements prevail over actual competence. Political institutions, above all, require recognition from other political players, which results primarily from the way in which they are presented to them. The manner of presentation has more in common with acting skills than with actual identity. We use the latter concept here only to create a contrast between a purely phenomenological identity (resulting from the perception of other actors) and a postulative concept of identity referring to the category of truth in social and political behaviour.

The above distinction between particular types of institutions is also a theoretical postulate, and its weakness results from the fact that all participants of social games are actors. Uncertainty as to the basic fact of who is who does not only concern the so-called pure politics. It is politics that is a phenomenon that is generated by the human condition, in which game and uncertainty are the basic ingredients. Again, let us emphasize here the role of culture as a resource of heuristics and rules of behaviour which, at least on a subjective level (routines and cultural rituals), reduce the feeling of insecurity. In the field of pure politics (a purely hypothetical state) it is easier to see this aspect of the human condition, especially in situations of radical conflict and rapid fluctuations in political status. The kings are naked, always naked, but it is inappropriate to talk about it, because then the status game would lose its seductive appeal.

The distinction between truth and meaning around which debates in semantics are applied to human behaviour lose its relevance if it were to lead to the definitive (true) establishment of our identities. The underlying reason is that the meanings of the concepts that describe our behaviour are internal. They are the product of the social game of meaning, in which recognition is also constituted by who we are to each other. The search for the *objectively* great leader, an authority, or a charismatic politician makes no sense whatsoever. We are dealing here with historical decisions in the status game that we can relate and criticize, but going beyond the recognition game is an illusion because each criticism is based on subjective and historical judgments.

As part of constructive criticism of this semantic aspect of human behaviour, we should draw attention to the fact that even the most fantastic, heroic and mythologized identity game has its own behavioural correlates. The concept of behaviour in the social sciences is particularly useful here because it takes us beyond the perspective of culture, language and even species It also allows us to search for explanatory models for political fantasies in the structures of our minds and brains, with their entire evolutionary history. Our perception and its features, which we transfer to political relations, is to a large extent subject to aesthetic evaluation, which in its more objectified aspect offers us the category of proportion. Status games are characterized, among other things, by the fact

that we do not apply this idea consistently in assessing political agency and confuse our position in the structure of the game with the possibility of doing so-called great deeds. So what is the most obvious behavioural correlate in the world of meanings? We can again, in the framework of a certain theoretical idealization, reduce it to two reactions: obedience or disobedience.

We previously mentioned the difference between the *meaning* and *significance*. As part of this distinction in the world of political games, the meanings of the two concepts converge when we obey someone. However, in a situation where we refuse to obey someone, we bring down their *significance* to *meaning* (recognition without recognition), i.e. we inform them about the impossibility of cooperation within the political game (let us leave aside here the infinite possibilities of playing obedience, i.e. its appearances). The hierarchy of preferences in this case consists only two elements, and the choice within it can also be decided on the level of emotions and of what we call a sense of taste. The rationalization processes, in turn, replace, in many cases, the rational evaluation of our own obedience to another human being. This is facilitated by culture with the symbolic meanings that characterize institutions. Apart from traditional systems of power such as monarchies, a similar rationalization is offered by socially constructed phenomena of authority or charisma. Both social sciences and historical theories that promote the ideas of the heroes have their share in constructing these phenomena. The rational premise in this type of ideological treatment is to persuade people to cooperate, which generally has a positive character, although history clearly suggests that the mere fact of cooperation does not yet determine the meaningfulness of collective behaviour.

From the perspective of the vertical structure of the status game, cooperation reveals its dual structure, in which obedience can be a profit (payoff) for both those who require it and those who show it, because depending on the game's structure, both attitudes are useful on the *way up*. This does not exclude the occurrence of various types of misperceptions and fundamental errors in the assessment of the situation by individual players. The point is that we do not have tables of results for such long-term games. Mistakes become obvious *post factum* and only then do the cognitive dissonances emerge, which need to be dealt with due to the players' understanding of their own identity. Rationalization techniques are so rich in resources, however, that most players eventually manage to tell themselves a version of the story that they may consider plausible and in which they play positive roles. Memory is a cognitive structure that is subject to modification both on an individual and collective level, which makes the process of the evolution of identity easier without violating the beliefs of the subject, acting as the narrator that they still remained what they were, i.e. they retained their own *identity*.

Let us conclude our analysis with a brief comment on language, culture and politics. Status games interpreted solely as games for a place in the hierarchy are not a characteristic of our species, nor are group conflicts, which we often consider to be the defining features of politics. Culture as a resource of techniques for producing tools, the ability to organize and read information within its framework is not such a distinguishing

feature, either. Only language, in its special function of transferring and preserving meanings in time, can be considered an important element shaping and enabling politics in its human aspect. It is a language as a tool for self-expression (speech) which made the communication sphere of a species the space for a dispute over identity. Of course, language did not erase all other structural conditions of man. In relation to social or economic relations, it seems to be the softest part of politics. But despite this assumed softness of language, the conflict over freedom of speech and the right to speak has been and continues to be subjected to all sorts of restrictions. The opponents of freedom of speech seem to understand its power more often than its supporters, as freedom of speech threatens stereotypisation of *meanings*, especially those denoting social and political hierarchies. Understanding the fragility of these meanings marks the beginning of a revolution, but certainly not the end of the status game.

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