

Political Epistemologies of Eastern Europe

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The international workshop „Political Epistemologies of Eastern Europe“, a follow-up of the 2015 summon „A New Organon. Science Studies in Poland between the Wars“, was pointing to the diverse conceptions of „Eastern“ European Epistemologies, of rationality and truth and their historical, political or otherwise bound ideological claims. This perspective gave room for a broader history of (Eastern) European Epistemologies in respect of an incredible variety to the cultural shaping of rationalities and epistemological categories throughout the 20th century. In the introductory words of BERNHARD KLEE-
BERG and FRIECHRICH CAIN (both Erfurt), „there is a significant difference between an analysis of the variations of European ideologies, and the approach that might be called a Political, or Political-Historical Epistemology: The latter does not propose (1) a clear-cut border between rationality and ideology in the sense that there would be a sphere of misinformation, manipulation and oppression as opposed to a sphere of rationality, truth, and freedom; and it does not propose (2) a clear-cut border between science and politics, even though it of course is of analytical importance to differentiate between social fields with their respective habits and hierarchies or communicative systems that follow the code of power/powerlessness or the

code of true and false.“ Epistemology in this sense can be seen as a study of „the whole system of the scientific production of knowledge“. Here, an internal political claim is already inherent in relation to power structures, hierarchies and dominant concepts and truth regimes. Second, they can be understood in the Kantian tradition of „Erkenntnistheorie“ in which they „refer to a theory of knowledge“ that ask about the limits and criteria of knowledge. Historical Epistemology then attempts to historicize epistemological categories and parameters like evidence, facts, objectivity, and observation. Thus, the overall question of the workshop was placed between political, ideological and territorial changes in the loosely conceptualized area of Eastern Europe.

The conference started with early approaches from law and biology. In her paper, MARTA BUCHOLC (Bonn/Warsaw) diagnosed law as underrepresented in the discussion of history of science in Europe today. In the second half of the 19th and in the early 20th century, however, German speaking academia intensively discussed law as science. Few outsiders, particularly the „Freirechtsschule“ and Eugen Ehrlich, developed ideas against the scientific establishment: Law as science should apply methods and modes of reasoning of empirical science of society, thus transform law into an empirical study of social norms. Ehrlich, as an empirical sociologist of law, focused on the living law of the peoples as an alternative to the „law in books“. Undermining the unity and uniformity of the state legal order at the time of codification and unification of law, Ehrlich discovered legal pluralism underneath alleged legal uniformity. Yet, Ehrlich's ideas did not gain acceptance: law became state-oriented and academically isolated. TOMAS HERMANN and JAN MUSIL (both Prague) introduced historian of science and biologist Emanuel Rádl, the „Czech version of Ludwik Fleck“. Before World War I he worked on experimental science and phototropism but also published on the history of biology, opposing objectivism and positivism. During the interwar period and World War II, he focused on theories of democracy, critique of racism and reflections about „West-

ern and Eastern" civilization. He criticized Darwin and advertised the full scope of diverse theories in the history of the investigation of life. Rádl situated his concept of Truth as a personal matter of conviction which had its beginnings in the experience of reality. Thus, theory became one of the main sources to change personal convictions and with it the perception of reality. The dualism of subject and object is rather complex, since conviction and theory influence each other and become unstable elements. Out of this instability of subject-matter grows a special responsibility for the philosopher and scientist, since a scientific and philosophical investigation, in the meaning of cultural influence and public life, shapes theory and political ideologies and vice versa.

The second panel explored western-eastern Europe's connections. KATRIN STEFFEN (Lüneburg) presented political and ideological agendas of medicine, anthropology and eugenics in the Polish state after 1918. She analyzed the example of Ludwik Hirsztfeld, who worked in the state-owned hygienic institute on blood types. She focused on the intellectual and administrative heritage of the three former imperial powers (German, Austrian-Hungarian, and Russian Empire). The newly formed intellectual and scientific elite brought knowledge and science traditions from all former empires, while the new administration encouraged them to outshine the former imperial states to prove the value and legitimacy of Poland. Simultaneously, the imperial agenda and contacts to his former institutions, especially in Germany, shaped the scientific agenda. Scientification became fundamental to create the Polish state under the technocratic Sanacja regime (1926-1939). Traveling concepts and the circulation of knowledge played a major role for the practical solutions, e.g. in the field of eugenics, in the fight against STDs and demographic issues. Thus, state-controlled sovereignty meant the implementation of eugenic engineering and the biologicalisation of the social in Poland. EMILIA PLOSCEANU (Paris) introduced the Romanian Social Institute (RSI) and its life-time president sociologist Dimitrie Gusti (1880-1955) as a case study for politically driven epistemological research. While

the RSI was a collaborative local research network, it sustained many international cooperations. It was organized in interdisciplinary study groups who published its main periodical, „Arhiva pentru știința și reforma socială” („Archives for Science and Social Reform”, 1919-1943), and a monthly review, „Sociologie românească” („Romanian Sociology”, 1936-1942). The RSI's opus magnum „Enciclopedia României” („Encyclopedia of Romania”, 1938-1943) illustrated sociology as the „science of the nation”. Gusti, a pre-World War I German-trained sociologist, aimed to create a methodological and theoretical orientation with a local „epistemic community” that wished to establish sociology as a major science and as a way of „soft power”, meaning the peaceful management of conflicts via knowledge and research by denationalizing science via its local social positioning. Gusti defined his system of sociology as „sociological parallelism”, which could be called interdisciplinary. It was a political epistemology, a combination of the encyclopedic knowledge policy of the RSI, its local empirical field of study as well as power discourses of national unity.

In the third panel, Marxist approaches in science were discussed. ALEXANDER N. DMITRIEV (Moscow) highlighted major early Soviet Union studies on the new history and philosophy of science and their European context. The 1910s were marked by a rise of public popularity of social sciences. Although academic disciplines started to develop separately, Russian historiographical traditions simultaneously promoted an integrative vision of наука (science). In the 1920s, history of knowledge became a focus of the Commission for the History of Science, Philosophy and Technics (est. 1921) of Academy of Science, founded and led by Vladimir Vernadsky. Marxism in this context was discussed as search of holistic and historicist treatment of intellectual development. Dmitriev identified two major approaches, historicists and neo-positivists. After the purges in the 1930s, Boris Hessen's exemplary Marxist approach was criticized. Thus, liberal Vernadsky, rather than Marxist Hessen became a great-founder for mainstream late Soviet historiography of science. VEDRAN DUANCIC (Zagreb) dealt

with the epistemology of natural sciences in the 1930s to 1950s in Yugoslav sciences. Ten years after the USSR, charges of vulgar mechanist materialism were prompted by unorthodox interpretations of Freudianism and the theory of relativity. Unlike the pre-war period, as the epistemology of natural sciences became a battleground within the Communist Party of Yugoslavia, natural sciences received little attention from the ideological apparatus of the Yugoslav government. In the USSR, verdicts by Stalin on scientific matters were issued. In contrast, their „closest ally“ Yugoslavia did not restrict research. Duančić explained this contrary situation as either „overlooked“ by the Party or because of a shortage of authoritative cadre.

Opening the fourth panel on „transnational enrichments“, FRIEDRICH CAIN proposed an analysis in education as a fruitful venue for the discussion of political epistemology. Arguing with Niklas Luhmann's first and second order observing, and demonstrating that politics and epistemology are inseparable, he detected three examples of strongly interconnected practices in Poland between the turn of the century to 1940. First, Cain focused on Ovide Decroly's model of progressive education which impacted Antoni Bolesław Dobrowolski for his claim on reforming the Polish school system. Second, he reasoned that the secret circles in fin-de-siècle Warsaw, focusing on education, slowly shifted to an official level. Third, Cain dealt with 'alternative sides of education', and Florian Znaniecki's return to Poland from the US and his pledge for a humanistic science rather than a social psychology. KATE LEBOW (Oxford) focused likewise on interwar Polish sociologists in the US. A number of Polish sociologists researched in US institutions and shared a vivid interest in 'personal documents'. Rather than describing this relationship as a diffusion of center to periphery, she pointed out the higher intellectual standing of Polish scientists in qualitative methodology. In the advent of changing geopolitical realities in the 1940s, Lebow concluded, this relationship cannot be described in terms of failure and discontinuity, but rather as a reminder of the roots of intellectual formations in the 1930s as well as personal bonds becoming political.

JOANNA WAWRZYŃIAK (Warsaw) opened the last panel with her contribution on Polish sociology in a comparative approach of two areas: the reconceptualization of history of sociology, and the entanglements with developing countries during the Cold War. In the institutional revival of sociology in the 1960s with its international opening, Warsaw-based scholar Nina Assorodobraj-Kula's work connected Eastern Central Europe with Western Africa. During her stays in France, Assorodobraj-Kula was able to establish contacts with Western African intellectuals and develop an agenda to compare class formation and concepts of nation-building in 19th century Eastern Europe with 20th century Western Africa. Thus, the study sheds light to the sources of production and the circulation of knowledge at the beginning and end of an intellectual generation. Both cosmopolitan and national, the roots of the modernization-backwardness-debate can be traced back into the interwar. Finally, KARL HALL (Budapest) investigated the area of tension between Soviet/Western scientific cooperation. The USSR contributed to the initially Western 'atoms for peace' movement with reliable Soviet scientists; moreover, the Soviet Academy of Science reached out to scientific institutions in East Central Europe. With the example of the Joint Institute for Nuclear Research in Dubna, standing out for their highest scientific cooperation, Hall pleaded for the worthwhile analyses of interaction of the Dubna Research Center in terms of language, material and politics, and despite the actual scientific outcome of the institution.

The workshop closed with a roundtable discussion. The term „Political Epistemologies of Eastern Europe“ has been widely discussed from different perspectives. MONIKA WULZ (Zürich), coming from the field of history and philosophy of sciences, stressed out the complexity of the topic in their diversity of languages, political events and methodological debates. Rather, studies require an interdisciplinary framework with different competences and partners for a diverse perception of political epistemologies. Transgressing borders could not be studied in exclusively national contexts, but should be examined

transnationally. This would lead to the chance of not producing sole „laboratory studies“, a criticism that has accompanied recent history of science. RICCARDO NICOLOSI (Munich) problematized the term ‘political epistemology’ too, which oscillated either as a system of knowledge production or as historicity of epistemological categories in a narrower sense. He questioned if epistemologies are political per se and asked about the distinctions between social, cultural and political epistemologies and the dimension of political imagination. DIETLIND HÜCHTKER (Leipzig) accentuated the combination of different perspectives for instance the aspect of emotions which structures epistemologies.

The category of Eastern Europe in their meanings was addressed by several discussants. In his perspective of literary history and Slavic studies, Nicolosi asked whether the term is appropriate in the context of history of science. The term is commonly connected to projections of the Cold War period, whereas scientific discussions, as the workshop demonstrated, date already way back to before the Cold War. Subsequently, knowledge production of both imperial and national spaces was encountered. Hüchtker emphasized the deconstruction of „Eastern Europe“ as a spatialization of places and relationships, supporting the concept of traveling and spaces defined by movement. Lebow reinforced the imagined and constructed character of Eastern Europe, but pointed out the exclusion of Eastern Europe in the fields of history of science and intellectual history. JAN SURMAN (Moscow/Vienna/Linz) emphasized that in the future both comparisons and connections might be fruitful as well as the analysis of networks which are enclosing multiple spaces. Another challenge will be dealings with different temporalities and high numbers of transgressions.

Conference Overview:

Introduction

Friedrich Cain (Erfurt), Bernhard Kleeberg (Erfurt): Political Epistemologies of Eastern Europe

Panel 1: Situating Knowledge: Early Approaches from Law and Biology

Chair: Dietlind Hüchtker (Leipzig)

Commentary: Bernhard Kleeberg

Marta Bucholc (Bonn/Warsaw): Political Epistemology of Law: Emancipation Through Disciplinary Transgression. Eugen Ehrlich and the Emergence of Empirical Sociology of Law

Tomáš Hermann and Jan Musil (Prague): Emmanuel Rádl (1873-1942) as a Historian of Biology

Panel 2: Thinking Science in the Interwar I: Western-Eastern Europe

Chair: Jan Surman (Moscow/Vienna/Linz)

Commentary: Jan Surman

Gábor Gángó (Erfurt): Karl Mannheim’s (1893-1947) Structural Analysis in Epistemology and its Early Reception in Germany

Katrin Steffen (Lüneburg): The Relation of Space, Time and Science: Case Studies from Interwar Poland

Emilia Plosceanu (Paris): The Nomadic Trajectory of „Social Parallelism“: A Local Example of Political Epistemology (Romania)

Panel 3: Thinking Science in the Interwar II: Communist Approaches

Chair: Friedrich Cain

Commentary: Jan Surman

Alexander N. Dmitriev (Moscow): Beyond Boris Hessen: New History and Philosophy of Science in Early Soviet Union

Vedran Duančić (Zagreb): The Forgotten Knowledge: Yugoslav Communists and the Epistemology of Natural Sciences, 1930-1950

Panel 4: Traveling Reflexivity I: Transnational Enrichments

Chair: Jan Surman

Commentary: Kornelia Kończal (Dresden)

Friedrich Cain: Alternative Sites of Education. Brussels, Illinois, Warsaw

Katherine Lebow (Oxford): Looking to the Promised Land: Transatlantic Social Science between Poland and the United States, 1914-1950

Panel 5: Traveling Reflexivity II: Comparisons

and Cosmopolitisms

Chair: Bernhard Kleeberg

Commentary: Dietlind Hüchtker

Joanna Wawrzyniak (Warsaw): Western Africa in Eastern Europe: On a Comparative Approach in Polish Sociology

Karl Hall (Budapest): From Geneva to Dubna: How Cosmopolitan Was East Bloc Scientific Cooperation?

Roundtable: Political Epistemology and beyond: Historicizing science in Central, Eastern and South-Eastern Europe

Chair: Jan Surman

Discussants:

Riccardo Nicolosi (Munich), Monika Wulz (Zürich), Dietlind Hüchtker

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