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# Study of International Relations and Political Science by Using “Theory”

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## **ABSTRACT**

*In this research paper the author is going to answer the question, that intrigues many researchers of international relations and political science – is it possible to build a grand theory explaining actions and behaviors of political, and international, entities?*

*International relations are distinguished from other disciplines of science by its special character: they are polyarchic, plural, complex and impulsive (Pietraś, 1997, pp. 12-14). .is is why we find here, exceptional in contrary to other, more mature disciplines, diversity of opinions and answers to the question – in what way international relations shall be build? Searching for the right answer the researchers of international relations have to cross borders of many disciplines, also using research methods of sociologists, historians, economists, lawyers, psychologists and anthropologists. There is a similar problem with political science, as*

*the political matter is widely interpreted and, depending on the researcher and the analyzed political system, its scope is wide as when using so called largo sense in the totalitarian states, where even the choice of school for a child has a political character or as when using so called strict sense in the democratic systems (Skarżyńska, 2005, p. 149). The article is also a search for the answer to the above question by using concepts, conceptions and categories that can be found in other social sciences, mostly sociology and political science. It shall be mentioned that in the study of international relations, as in political science, we also have a very high influence of the value factor. Due to that reason it will be hard for the researcher, no matter how confidently he will try, to get rid of his personal judgment and personal system of values. Especially high influence has culture (or cultures) connected with the specific geographical region (cultural), which through political socialization, i.e. defines current perfect type of personality (Szczepański, 1970, pp. 121–138) – different for the western culture,*

*different for the eastern orthodox and different for the Islam.*

## **DEFINITION OF THE CONCEPTION ‘THEORY’**

Contemporary understanding of ‘theory’ in social sciences is various. P. Sztompka In “Teoria i wyjaśnienie. Z metodologicznych problemów socjologii” (The theory and Explanation. From Methodological Problems of Sociology), presents different apprehensions (Sztompka, Teoria i wyjaśnianie. Z metodologicznych problemów socjologii, 1973, p. 37) Firstly, according to colloquial meaning of ‘theory’, it has a negative connotation, as something which we do not like, but in science it is different. It has a positive meaning, so also a high value. Secondly, the term ‘theory’ is sometimes defined using contrary:

- Theory as an opposite of practice;
- Theory as an opposite of empiric;
- Theory as an opposite of precise;
- Theory as an opposite of colloquial knowledge;
- Theory as an opposite of certain knowledge.

Thirdly, you can also define ‘theory’ as a synonym of another conception:

- Theory as a synonym of political thought theory;

- Theory as a synonym of social sciences methodology;
- Theory as a synonym of a heuristic approach;
- Theory as a synonym of social philosophy;
- Theory being identified with descriptive characteristics of social phenomenon.
- Theory as a synonym of scheme of concepts.

Fourthly, in social sciences, you can find five types of theorems, depending on

Conditions that are bound to those theories:

1. Theoretical are theorems that concern relations between phenomenon or variables, not theorems about facts;
2. Theoretical are existential theorems, which have a form of an implication (if A then B);
3. Theoretical are theorems which are highly general, meaning nomological general theorems;
4. Theoretical are theorems highly general in contrary to the colloquial theorems;
5. Theoretical are theorems which include so called theoretical conceptions.

Fifthly, from the point of view of a theoretical systematization, you can separate three apprehensions.

1. Theory is an any set of theoretical theorems;

2. Theory is a semantically systemized set of theorems;
3. Theory is a syntactically systemized set of theorems, so from a logic point of view.

Sixthly, in the functional point of view, theory may be defined by emphasizing its autonomic functions – theory as a tool for building a theory. You may also emphasize its instrumental function –we understand the theory as a set of theorems which allow a practical action, or a set of theorems that allow explaining facts or generalizations –it answers the question ‘why?’ As you can notice in the above examples, understanding of the concept ‘theory’ is various. For us especially the last one is most suitable.

## **THEORIES IN SOCIAL SCIENCES**

It is a dream of many social sciences researchers to build a Grand Theory that would explain the nature of the man and the society. As an example theories made in formal sciences and natural sciences were presented. In social sciences, from the beginning of its creation, philosophy wanted to build a theory that would include whole universe of matter, nature and man. After philosophy mostly sociology has followed. Sociologists wanted to build the Grand theory, which would include social behavior of people, organizations and related to

them changes. First, it grew from a general intellectual atmosphere in which philosophical systems of great range had rapidly appeared. Eminent philosophers living in the 18th and at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century created philosophical systems which were suppose to gather as much of the universe as possible – Kant, Fichte, Schelling and Hegel. Ambitions of philosophers, who were constructing creation of “general systems became a pattern for contemporary sociologists. Due to that the 19th century was the sociological systems era” (Merton, 1982, p. 66) – Comte, Spencer, later Gumpłowicz, Ward, Giddings – they were rather building a general and “final frameworks for sociological thought than developing theories dedicated to steer sociological problem researches. “In these conditions nearly all sociological pioneers were endeavoring to frame their own system. Multiplicity of systems of which every, as it was announced, was to be the truest sociology, was in a natural way leading to establishment of schools, with their own masters, students and epigones” (Merton, 1982, pp. 66-67). It caused division inside sociological schools, which were separated and mostly contradictory. !e other trend in sociology also wanted to build grand theories, but for a prototype it took natural sciences theory systems. Not everyone shares this enthusiasm for constructing such general theory. C. Wright

Mills (Wright Mills, 1959, p. 23) claimed that building such theory will be an obstacle in development of the humanities. It was an 'enmity' for constructing abstract and normative theories of human nature and behavior, an enmity which he shared with eminent practitioners (...) from all social sciences in that time in whole Anglo-Saxon world" (Skinner, 1998, pp. 7-8). "In the 1990'ties Charles Lemart pointed another reason of the end of the theory. This was 'natural social thought tendency' to loosen, relax and set free from the pressure of questioning oneself the nature of this what is going on around us, when we just don't feel the pressure of the social problems. Such periods were called by him temporal »golden moments«" (Misztal, 2000, p. 6). Similar scepticism you can notice at Daniell Bell (Bell, 1960) in his book "The End of Ideology" or in R. Aron's work "The Intellectuals Opium" (Aron, 2000). Both researchers claimed that the time of building grand theories which have an ideological base had passed. Every effort toward building a general social and political philosophy theory had passed and one shall desist building such theories because these have only heuristic value and will never keep abreast with the development of formal sciences. British philosopher Isaiah Berlin in 1970'ties wrote a provocative article – 'Does Political Theory Exists?' In 1980'ties he revised some parts,

supplemented and published it (Berlin, 1980). Most of political scientists aren't that sceptical. Franciszek Ryszka wrote: "The theory of politics in philosophical concept – meant as a beyond historical generalization, remained from the ancient times until today and it gives political science an especially high rank because of its outstanding but still relative durability" (Ryszka, 1989, p. 13). You can see that there are also opinions that there is a need of creating theories in every social science, but there are also contradictory ideas concerning building wide range political theories.

## **THE HIERARCHY OF THE 'THEORY'**

Analyzing the structure and types of theories found in the social sciences you can identify five levels of theories concerning scale and width of certain theory.

First level, the broadest – so called 'Grand "Theory', means a general theory of social sciences which would explain the nature of man and society. Today, such theory may be built only on the background of social philosophy. After the disgrace of Marxism presented as the 'Grand "Theory', today slowly, when it comes to explaining man's behavior, the 'theory of rational acting appears. On the historical ground this concept was pressed by J. Topolski (Topolski, 1983), on the field of the humanistic – J. Kmita (Kmita, 1971), philosophy – L.

Nowak (Nowak, 1977), political science – A. Bodnar and O. Cetwiński (Bodnar & Cetwiński, 1977) (Klementewicz, Spór o model metodologiczny nauki o polityce, 1991) (Sielski, 1997), and abroad mostly J. Habermas (Skinner, 1998, p. 24; Giddens, p. 141). "Is theory is most popular among social sciences and it aspires to be the 'Grand "theory'.

Second level, related to the 'general theory of certain science discipline', that has a social character, i.e. general theory of sociology, general theory of political science or international relations science.

As the first level also the second has a meta-theoretical character. Meta-theorizing in such frame is a source of superior perspectives set to create a superior metatheory in relation to the whole general theory or its part (Ritzer, 2004, pp. 310– 311)<sup>1</sup>. In this point of view the second level will be meta-sociology which is sociology of sociology, Meta political science (Węgrzecki, 2004, p. 59)<sup>2</sup> and meta-theory of international relations<sup>3</sup>. Especially in the frame of sociology a lot of meta-sociology was created, meaning frames aspiring to be the general theory of sociology. For example Wallace's disciplinary matrix (Toward a Disciplinary Matrix in Sociology, 1988) or Ritzer's integrated sociological paradigm (Ritzer, 2004, pp. 312, 317)<sup>4</sup>.

In political science in the USSR satellite countries one political science was dominant – the Marxists. Today the meta-theoretical trend is somehow 'dead' – there are no significant attempts to build the meta-political science.

It is similar with international relations science – today you do find significant and acknowledged attempts of building meta-international relations science. "Theories of a wide range (also called the general theories), that function inside one research discipline, are the third level. Usually the partition criteria are related to defining the paradigm. "This conception was first used by T. Kuhn. In the basic point of view the paradigm shall be used to distinguish cognitive groups in the frames of one science discipline. Ritzer defines this concept: "Paradigm is the widest unit of consensus inside science, which allows us to distinguish one science community (or science sub community) from another. It sorts out, defines and binds together existing inside such community exemplars, theories methods and research tools" (Ritzer, 2004, p. 315).

Today social sciences may be described as multi-paradigmatic. Simplifying it you may say that building a paradigm is creating a concept which consists of middle range and detailed theories. You may notice it especially in sociology. Most popular typology of the theory, when you distinguish them using various

paradigms, was made by J. H. Turner, who presented four approved sociological theories: functional, conflicts, social exchange, interactionism, and the ethno-methodological one (Turner, 1985, pp. 72–73)5. G. Ritzer distinguished three, dominant in sociology, paradigms: socio-factographic, socio-defining and socio-behavioral (Ritzer, 2004, p. 315).

Political science, similarly to sociology, has a multi-paradigmatic character. In this case the relation to the understanding of the concept of 'politics' may be the paradigms.

"The first paradigm is related to the power. In this understanding one shall explain political actions bound to Endeavour of gaining power or keeping it. Generally you may call it 'the theory of power'. In frames of this theory there are another, lower level theories, i.e. conflict, exchange, political leadership and others.

"The second paradigm is related to the functioning of social entirities. In this case you will explain political actions which are bound to organizing and redistribution functions of the society or those which shall guarantee stabilization and durability of the system. It will be then the system theory.

"The third paradigm is connected to political decisions. Political actions shall be explained with relation to subjects of politics that may make independent political decisions. It will be 'the theory of political decision' or called in

other way 'the theory of making decisions'. You can notice a different views at this problem in ""Theory and Methods in Political Science"" edited by D. Marsch and G. Stroker, where seven approaches to politics are enumerated:

1. The behaviorism,
2. The rational choice,
3. The institutionalism,
4. The feminism,
5. The theory of interpellation,
6. The Marxism,
7. The normative theory (Marsch & Stroker, 2002).

Today, in political science, there are no dominant paradigms, and this is why we may find many various interpretations and approaches. In the international relations science we have three dominant paradigms. "These were first presented by J. N. Rosenau distinguishing three categories: state-centric, multicentric, and global-centric (Rosenau, 1982). Later P. R. Viotti and M. V. Kauppi named them straight as theories of realism, pluralism and globalism (Viotti & Kauppi, 1987). "These three theories have been accepted in Polish literature. T. Łoś-Nowak and others confirmed. "The inter-paradigmatic debate concentrates "around neorealism (and structural realism), neoliberalism (neoidealism) with its many types (pluralism, correlation and transnationalism) and structuralism (called also neomarksizm or

globalism)” (Łoś-Nowak, 2000, p. 59; Zyblikiewicz, 2004, p. 19; Gałganek, 1998, p. 21).

"The fourth level is the middle range theories and details theories are the fifth." The difference between both types of theories is not very clear. R. K. Merton describes them in relation to the grand theory. "Middle ranges theories (...) are those, which are located between significant, but necessary working hypothesis made during everyday research work and the most general, consequent attempts of developing homogenous theory, thanks to which it is possible to explain rules noticeable in behaviors, organizing and social change" (Merton, 1982, p. 60). Middle range theories, similarly to grand theories, are going to gain high generality of its theorem, while narrowing down its research field to a specific fragment of social reality. Usually it is related to a separated section of a social discipline, i.e. theory of bureaucracy, theory of social socialization and others. Detail theories are usually a part of a higher level one, e.g. the theory of bureaucracy consists also of following detailed theories: the theory of a vicious circle by M. Crozier (Crozier, 1967), the theory of learned incompetence by R. Merton (Merton, 1982); and the theory of political socialization consists also of the theory of anxiety by D. Jaros and the theory of rebellion by this same researcher (Jaros, 1973). "Theorems of which

middle range and detailed theories consist of, are more precise than the grand theories so these are less general in order to, basing on them, build science laws. Middle range theory is the link between grand theories of the discipline and the detailed one, which is giving a direction to empirical researches. In political science the theory of making decisions consists of such theories as the game theory and detailed theories – the prisoner's dilemma; middle: micro-social approach, detailed – the theory of group thinking syndrome (Pietraś, *Stosunki międzynarodowe*, 1997, p. 22). The theory of power consists of, e.g. the theory of political leadership – detailed one is the theory of leadership appearance, political personality and others (Klementewicz, *Oblicza eklektyzmu. Teorie średniego rzędu w badaniach politologicznych*, 1989, p. 109).

In international relations an example of a grand theory is globalism, theories of middle range are: structuralism, the theory of dependence or the critical theory (Sałajczyk, 2001, p. 58). Detailed theories are, e.g. concepts of fanaticism and fundamentalism.

## **THE STATUS OF THEORY IN SOCIAL SCIENCES**

In my opinion you should make one significant comment while writing about the status of theory in international relations. The status of

theory in international relations is this same as of sociology and political science. Due to that nearly all matters that concern the science of international relations concern also sociology and political science.

Firstly, in all three sciences the research matter is complex and dynamic and because of that reason this matter is hard to generalize and if yet it is usually at the philosophical assumptions level, abstract conceptions and fundamental laws. This is why these theories are often called approaches, orientations, explaining models, concepts, perspectives or you just put inverted commas for the conception 'theory' (Turner, 1985, p. 72).

Secondly, in science, according to generality of made theorems, you can distinguish four types of sciences. The first type has got a theoretical character that has a high degree of complexity, is highly axiomatic, where theorems are deducted from axioms, so they are 100% confident. These are mathematics and logic. Second type of sciences may be called the idealizing. These are sciences close to certainty, so theorems build in frames of that sciences are highly probable, e.g. physics and chemistry. Their certainty is related to the current paradigm of knowledge of a discipline. If the paradigm changes many theorems formulated in that time period has to be replaced. The best example is the shape of the Earth. There was a belief in the

Middle Ages that the Earth is that. Later it had changed. People thought that the Earth is round, so the paradigm of knowledge has changed and today we think that the Earth is an ellipse. You notice here some kind of synchronization – if the paradigms of knowledge changes, theorems describing objective reality also change. For that reason these kinds of sciences have theorems related to the current level of knowledge in that discipline. When that level changes – due to new scientific discoveries – new theorems are formulated and these follow the new level of knowledge. "This type of knowledge has an idealizing character because we idealize current level of knowledge as the certain one and meanwhile it is only highly probable and with new scientific discoveries some theorems shall be eliminated from science as those which does not follow current scientific reality." The third type of sciences is called the statistic one, while some assumptions of science which are in the current theorems are true in many cases but not in every – i.e. economy. We may call the fourth type of sciences the generalizing one, because building theorems, by researchers working in that sciences, does not even have a statistic character. "These are sociology, political science and international relations science." Theorems formulated in frames of that sciences are generalizations and regularities which are hard, if you try to be precise, to be



called laws of science, because these are not even statistically regular. "This kind of sciences does not have recurrent laws." They are only related to some time period and they present the reality usually from one point of view – conflict or functional.

## CONCLUSIONS

Today the theory of international relations science, which is a generalizing science, is not capable of building one theory that could be recognized in frames of a specific science discipline. Only if a political power in some country politically imposes that there is only one obligatory and true theory. It was so with the Marxists theory in the 'real socialism' countries. But it does not have anything in common with science, while these beliefs were imposed by a political power. "Theoretically you may imagine that a voting of the science community over a problem which a theory in that moment is the best and which are obligatory, but how it shall be done? Will science community comply with such voting? I doubt it. Because of that you shall assume, that this kind of sciences will always have, functioning as equal, many acknowledged paradigms. Attractiveness of certain theory, in frames of that sciences, is related to its generality and coming out of it capability of describing various phenomena and social facts

and to the fact how much it is confirmed by empirical data. Specific fragment of social reality could be then analyzed using sometimes opposite social theories, which may give satisfying results.

Some advices shall be formulated for all social sciences researchers:

1. "Each social sciences theory is useful as much as it explains social reality in whole, or in its fragment, in a logic way, that may be confirmed by empirical examples. Due to that none of the theories shall be rejected a priori. You shouldn't get used to any as well, in order not to limit your cognitive perspective.

2. Social reality is much too complex and changeable in time and space to be explained using only one theory. Social reality shall be understood and researched with its whole complexity and you shall not try to take it into frames of a limited set of theorems. Automatic transfer of a theorem that concerns one fragment of a social reality to another fragment, from one period of social development to another, is invalid" (Pawłowska, 1998, p. 14)

Finishing the article one thing shall be mentioned: community of scientists is aware of the fact that there is also a zero point in the hierarchy of theories – a common theory for formal, natural and social sciences. Today, at this level of development of science, it is only a postulate, which will not be quickly fulfilled.

Nevertheless, who wouldn't like to build a Super Grand "Theory?"

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