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“The Political” versus/and Synonymous Terms. An Attempt to Analyse a Theoretical Discourse

Abstract: The paper is an attempt to reconstruct the theoretical discourse on the strategy of using the notion of “the political” and related notions in Polish political theory. The author argues that these concepts, appearing in large numbers in recent years, are not an expression of pointless terminological disputes, but an attempt to cope with the complex character of various political phenomena that are the result of dynamic processes of the politicisation of various previously non-political problems of collective life. The text discusses two ways of understanding “the political” that dominate among Polish political scientists: as an aspect of various political phenomena in conventionally understood politics and beyond, and as a category that allows one to name the fundamental principles through which society as a whole and its various parts (e.g. social classes) are formed. The text also discusses three strategies for searching for synonymous terms in relations to politics and “the political”: (1) attempts to find a superordinate category; (2) transformations of the notion of “the political” through various clarifications (e.g. organic politics) and prefixes (e.g. meta-politics); (3) orientation towards borderline phenomena (e.g. quasi-political ones) in the context of processes of politicisation and depoliticisation that allow for a continuous reconfiguration of the boundaries of what is political.

Keywords: theory of politics, the political, what is political, politicisation, political phenomena

Any reflection on the nature of political phenomena should assume that politics no longer has a monopoly on “the political”. This is related to the ongoing process in which the boundaries of politics are becoming more and more liquid (Jabłoński, 2012, p. 33; Rubisz, 2015, p. 131). I think that two planes of change

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are of key importance in this context. On the first plane, grassroots political practices (e.g. social movements, activism, urban movements) have become significant. The other plane comprises the processes of politicising previously non-political issues that, as a result of developments, including those in science and technology, start to acquire this character and cause the blurring of the boundaries of politics. As a result, as Ulrich Beck put it (2004, pp. 27–284), politics has undergone depoliticisation and can no longer control new, socially risky phenomena that, although seemingly non-political, acquire political significance. Such a character has been acquired, for example, by bioethical issues, environmental problems, artificial intelligence and robotisation. British sociologist Anthony Giddens (2012) even considers the so-called politics of life, i.e. the sphere of people's daily choices (e.g. the question of identity), to be at stake in contemporary ideological confrontations. Already more than half a century ago, Carol Hanisch (1969), in her groundbreaking text, stated in the context of the treatment of women in severe personal distress that what is private is also political.

Discussions concerning the consequences of these transformations for political sciences have formed a very interesting theoretical discourse, whose reconstruction and rearrangement based on the example of the achievements of Polish political theorists will be the proper subject of these deliberations. For this purpose, I intend to analyse the strategies of using the notion of “the political” and look for a certain regularity within them. In addition, I will juxtapose the notion of “the political” with other closely related notions and reflect on the relations among them. This effort is at least partially aimed at reconstructing the conceptual grid (Karwat, 1981) comprising the categories that relate to the essence and identifiability of all political phenomena. I will take into account both the prevalence of the terms in question, the frequency of their co-occurrence (e.g. in relation to politics), and the degree of their generality.

In the context outlined above, I would like to put forward two theses with respect to which I will problematise further considerations. Firstly, it is important to realise that we are nowadays confronted with a diversity of notions defining political phenomena. “The political” is perhaps the most popular category in the repertoire of such notions, but not the only one. Within the framework of the first thesis, I argue that these particular notions are not a manifestation of inflation in word formation, but cognitively valuable attempts to understand the diversity of political phenomena and the dynamics of processes of politicisation. Secondly, politicisation has by no means resolved terminological disputes and has become yet another essentially disputable notion. In the case of such concepts, as Walter Bryce Gallie teaches, it is impossible to conclusively establish the scope of meaning, which results in endless, but nevertheless important debates, because in this way increasingly reasonable arguments can be developed in scholarly disputes and meaning can be at least partially stably determined (Gallie, 1956, pp. 167–198). Thus, the second thesis indicates that, despite its

ambiguity, the disputable notion of "the political" (and other closely related notions) has proven to be an important tool for organising the theoretical discourse around the preliminaries of political sciences. Therefore, the dispute over that conceptual scope of the category of "the political" is more important than any conclusive resolution of what this scope is.

Strategies for using the concept of "the political"

In the following deliberations, I will be concerned not so much with reviewing the various approaches to "the political", as with considering the logic of applying this notion. At the same time, I want to weave a web of terms with which the notion of "the political" is associated in relation to both some superordinate and general group of phenomena and specific references allowing for a more precise insight into the conceptual scope. Reviewing the (both Polish and foreign) scientific discourse on the subject of "the political", I once drew attention to four approaches (Minkner, 2015, pp. 50–74). Thus, "the political" can mean a permanent and immanent property of a certain group of phenomena, a distinct domain of collective life, a possibility of an aspectual view of any social phenomenon, and a manifestation of fundamental social relations. In Polish political theory, the last two approaches dominate, and it is on them that I will mainly focus, bearing in mind that despite differences, the same researchers can be found in both groups of strategies.

"The political" as an aspectual quality of political phenomena

Within the first strategy, researchers regard "the political" primarily as a quality of a possibly wide range of politically significant phenomena that both enter the field of conventionally understood politics and go beyond it by radically changing various seemingly non-political social dimensions (culture, economics, art, everyday life, etc.). At the same time, the notion under discussion makes it possible to approach political phenomena from the most rudimentary point of view possible, i.e. constitutive qualities, key components, most important criteria. The result of reflection understood in this way is to be the identification of all political phenomena.

Individual researchers, although to varying degrees, adopt anti-formalist premises as part of the strategy under discussion, i.e. they oppose clear and unambiguous boundaries between such spheres of collective life as politics, society, culture, economy. The anti-formalist programme is also based on the premise that "the political" does not reductionistically refer to some single determinant property that is immanently and, as it were, exclusively attributed to a given

phenomenon and determines that it is political. Researchers formulate relational, contextual, and aspectual criteria according to which a political meaning is only one of the possible ones; in addition, it may be transient or of varying intensity (see: Karwat, 1996; Rubisz, 2015; Ścigaj, 2022). On this basis, we can call “the political” a borderline concept (Minkner, 2014, p. 15). This is because it allows for capturing the relationship between what is political and what is non-political, as well as various hybrid, separate, ostensibly or potentially political cases. The aim of this type of identification is not to establish some hard and definitive boundaries between what is political and what is (often apparently) non-political, but to understand that the line of demarcation is fluid, that many political phenomena are even located at the junctions of these boundary lines (Dybel, Wróbel, 2008). This was clearly put by Lech Rubisz (2015), who used the inspiration of Zygmunt Bauman to propose the concept of the liquid political. According to Rubisz, what we are witnessing nowadays is a real departure from politics, which in the modern period had the character of a “solid body” in the form of a clearly outlined sphere of institutions and organs of state power. Meanwhile, in the postmodern period, when fluidity prevails with regard to various processes, what is political has also evolved towards fluidity and, as a result, no longer has clear boundaries and is variable in time and intensity, including with regard to politics. In this way, power and institutional politics have been divorced, leading to the politicisation of formerly non-political spheres of life, above all the social and private spheres.

In Polish political sciences, the initiator of thinking about political phenomena that transcended the rigid boundaries of institutional and formal frameworks was undoubtedly Artur Bodnar, for whom a phenomenon is political insofar as it reflects in a particular way other, kind of extra-political spheres of life; with economics being of key importance for Bodnar (1980). In his (and his colleagues’) view, a social phenomenon can be linked to politics if it has a macro-social as well as ideological context, and thus concerns the interests of large social groups (Bodnar, Cetwiński, 1989, p. 28). Thus, for Bodnar and his disciples, politics was not a closed sphere of organs of power, but rather a mechanism for the organisation and selection of social aspirations within which various political and non-political interests of large social groups clash, which interests can only be satisfied politically. I put forward the thesis that this type of understanding of politics became already in modern times a favourable circumstance for adapting the concept of “the political” in Polish political sciences. The most concise programmes in this regard were proposed by Mirosław Karwat, Zbigniew Blok and Andrzej Czajowski. In time, they were joined by political scientists of the younger generation, such as Łukasz Młyńczyk, Paweł Ścigaj, Artur Laska, Wiktor Szewczak, Kamil Minkner and Magdalena Ozimek. They all drew on various conceptual inspirations (e.g. cultural studies, linguistics, psychology), but at the same time remained faithful to anti-formalist findings. A clear interpretation

of this approach was given, for example, by Filip Pierzchalski (2013, p. 35), for whom what is political is a "fuzzy research object", depending each time on the intentions of the cognitive subject and the situational context. Interestingly, the author did not use the notion of "the political" in his considerations but stuck to the notion of politics.

Within the framework of the various concepts of "the political", there appear both claims concerning the modality and status of "the political" and various specific criteria relating to the relevant mechanisms of politics that concretise the notion of the political at the level of the scope of its content. Karwat (2010) mostly writes about "the political" of phenomena, processes, and social relations, and characterises them primarily by means of two terms: aspects and syndromes. The former makes it possible to state that "the political" is a relative quality, it does not derive from the essence of a given phenomenon, but is, as it were, a kind of looking at it in terms of the phenomenon's relations with the mechanisms of political life. The notion of syndrome, on the other hand, allows for capturing the complex nature of political phenomena, which are not only not homogeneous (they result from the configuration and interdependence of both political and non-political phenomena), but also do not make up some separate area. According to Karwat, the key criterion that determines "the political" of a phenomenon is the macro-systemic conflicts of social interests, but also their convergence and integration. A similar view of the discussed issue is held by Laska, who regards "the political" as an accidental property (2017, p. 75). He states that what is political cannot be treated in a substantialist way, through the properties allegedly inherent in a given phenomenon or through their enumerative listing. Thus, the elements that make up the political significance of phenomena must be seen in a variable and dynamic way. What is political refers rather to the interaction between people and is related to the fulfilment of the basic life need of individuals, that is security. In contrast, Czajowski (2013) developed the concept of "the political" through the prism of political action. This allowed him to show a broader range of political practices that go beyond the conventionally understood party politics and organs of state power. Following a similar path, Radosław Marzęcki further refined the category of political action by conceptualising the notion of a style of political action. Doing so, the author broadened the repertoire of manifestations of what is political (Marzęcki, 2013).

In spite of the anti-formalist intention, in most of the concepts mentioned above, one senses a search for some kind of primeval specificity, something that is commonly recognised as political. In the case of Karwat, Laska and Czajowski, this is done explicitly by listing such phenomena that are, as it were, essentially political (e.g. power). Blok took a more relational approach to these issues (2009, p. 55–86), but even for him the core of politics is the result of the intersection of these fields, assumed by the researcher in advance. All these concepts are free

of postmodern wordplay and place the understanding of political phenomena on a stable, socio-economic foundation.

Despite their differences concerning details, the researchers representing the strategy in question rely on the will to go beyond the cratocentric optics. In their view, what is political is thus part of that theoretical tradition which Mariusz Gulczyński (2009) described as sociocentric. It defines politics, and more recently “the political”, from the perspective of the processes of articulation, representation, agreement and contradiction of social interests. “The political” of non-political phenomena in such an approach is linked to their association, sometimes structural and sometimes situational, with these social relations. This issue is also related to another one, that is the relationship between “the political” and politics. It is characteristic of the aforementioned researchers that, although “the political” is for them a problem that is, as it were, theoretically distinct, the concrete, one might say phenomenological, manifestations of “the political” are for them closely linked to politics, constituting, as it were, its extension. “The political” and politics are, as it were, organically linked within the broader system of what is political. As Janusz Golinowski puts it: “The space of the political is wide and built by a certain institutional, as well as political and legal, arrangement. In addition to the institutional sphere, which is the specific area of influence of politics the political also strongly permeates everyday life” (2011, p. 23). Some researchers use the two terms interchangeably, as it were, or – as Jakub Potulski (2016) does – together, using the construct politics / “the political”. The differences between the two components are largely a matter of where emphasis is placed. “The political” is often given a more determinative and, as it were, essential meaning in the arrangement of explicative practices. According to Szewczak, the notion of “the political” offers the possibility of a deeper insight than in the case of phenomena from the sphere of politics. Thanks to this, it is possible to expose the mechanisms of politics and to perceive conditions and dimensions invisible to those using a common-sense view (Szewczak, 2014, p. 11). At the same time, the notion of “the political” makes it possible to emphasise “the political” significance of phenomena that we usually consider to be non-political.

A separate place in explaining the relationship between politics and “the political” is held by a concept proposed by Zbigniew Blok and Remigiusz Rosicki. These researchers distinguish two types of “the political” in a way that other theorists do not. The first type of “the political” is primeval and arises from the biological nature of individuals who, in order to ensure their security, have the innate ability to separate friends and enemies as well as opportunities and threats. The second type involves the life of individuals in organised social communities, which is not a simple sum of “the political” of individuals. Blok refers to “the political” of communities as politics (2009, p. 38–42; 2013). It should be noted that the authors’ proposed distinction between the biological political and the social

political/politics has not taken hold, although it inspires one to have a closer look at the fundamental dualism of nature and politics.

"The political" as a problem of society undergoing structuring

Within the second strategy of using the notion of "the political", researchers wish to go through this category as a peculiar, somewhat distinct concept, proposing criteria that allow "the political" to be distinguished (sometimes singled out, differentiated) from other political phenomena, including politics itself. This usually involves the construction of some more compact theoretical programme within which the category of "the political" occupies a prominent place. Researchers here turn primarily to philosophical inspirations, and political theory, influenced by reflections on "the political", even acquires a philosophical character (Blok, Kołodziejczak, 2010; Minkner, 2014). This problem was thoroughly analysed by Ozimek (2020) in her dissertation (and in subsequent publications). The researcher has shown that the dispute over "the political" is by no means just a terminological difference of opinion that is cognitive in nature, but also a metatheoretical discussion in the field of political philosophy, and at the same time an ideological confrontation. It takes place at the heart of political sciences and deals with such problems as liberal democracy and such relations as individualism – collectivism, inclusion – exclusion and subject – structure. In this approach, the most representative concepts of "the political" involve the analysis, and in more critical approaches, the unmasking of the fundamental principles on which a given social system, public order, social relations, social wholes (e.g. classes) are based. Thus, seemingly non-political phenomena in the context of the principles of the construction of public order may have a thoroughly political significance. This character of "the political" was eloquently presented by Tadeusz Buksiński, who stated that researchers dealing with "the political" actually analyse the forms in which society is being structured and takes on "a particular form, for example liberal, socialist or democratic" (2006, p. 8). This optic also operates in Western theoretical discourse, regardless of conceptual differences. For Chantal Mouffe (2008, p. 23), "the political" involves an ontological level of social relations that includes fundamental contradictions. Noël O'Sullivan (1997), on the other hand, frames the issue more generally by arguing that the problem of "the political" arises primarily in the context of the diversity of contemporary societies and attempts to break them down.

The philosophical tropes referred to by Polish political scientists within the framework of the strategy discussed here underlie three distinct approaches: existential, critical, and normative.

The first of these derives from Carl Schmitt. In Polish political sciences, the doyen of this understanding was Franciszek Ryszka (1992). His work *On the Notion of Politics* was one of the first in Polish political sciences to report so

extensively on various concepts of “the political” within the framework of considerations that the author himself referred to as political semantics. At the heart of Ryszka’s deliberations was the reconstruction of the historical evolution of the notions of politics and “the political” based on the works of Max Weber, Carl Schmitt, Helmuth Plessner, Karl Liebknecht and Antonio Gramsci. Ryszka’s fundamental conclusion was that while politics is associated with power, the concept of “the political” is associated with a relationship of enmity and, based on this antagonism, making decisions of fundamental importance for the community in extraordinary situations.

In Polish political sciences, Schmitt’s concept was most comprehensively analysed and later expanded by Ryszard Skarżyński. His contribution to the explication of Schmitt’s notion of “the political” owes much to the juxtaposition of “the political” and politics, which Schmitt himself presented overly enigmatically. In Skarżyński’s commentary, politics turns out to be the sphere of decisions made by actors, while “the political” is a kind of structure within which relations embedded (if only potentially) in the primeval antagonism between enemy and friend take place between these actors. At the same time, perhaps wishing to deprive the notion of “the political” of its exclusive character, Skarżyński made it clear that it is not only about enmity itself, but also about its impact in various spheres of collective life. In his view, “the political” as a structure does not include “only the relations between these political actors, but also everything that concerns these relations” (1992, p. 173). Schmitt’s concept was subsequently used by Skarżyński (2011) to construct his own original approach to “the political”, within which the mobilisation of large unions of people in a large space and over a long time proved to be of key importance, these communities wishing by every possible means to create a viable order on the basis of their own ideas and clashing with other groups who want the same thing. It should be noted that this was a formalist approach, since Skarżyński considered that what is political could be unambiguously separated from what is social by means of properties assigned in advance, while at the same time distinguishing on this basis a somewhat autonomous area of study. This formalist aspect of Skarżyński’s proposal is essentially isolated in contemporary Polish political sciences.

Apart from Ryszka and Skarżyński, an interesting commentary on Schmitt’s concept of “the political” was made by Piotr Łukomski. First of all, he considerably broadened the understanding of enmity itself. In his view, it is no longer just an us-versus-them antagonism, but also enmity towards the world, natural environment, space, historical fate “and any other earthly circumstances that do not harmonise with our needs” (2013, p. 229). Łukomski also observed that enmity can arise from a relationship itself, from the nature of the objects that create it, but also these objects may influence particular situations. Most comprehensively, however, going beyond Schmittian inspirations, the category of enmity has been analysed in Polish theoretical political sciences by Jacek Ziółkowski (2013).

The second approach within the strategy under examination can be described as critical. As Szewczak argues (2014, p. 10), the notion of "the political" is immanently linked to the critical perspective, which, in his view, is the source of the real problem with the wider application of this notion in political sciences. This is because philosophical inclinations with factually critical overtones meant that "the political" was less a tool for describing and explaining social reality and was used more in analyses of unmasking and in projects to change existing socio-economic conditions. Szewczak's concerns were, however, alleviated by Bohdan Kaczmarek (2017), who aptly reasoned those political sciences, including the category of "the political", could be very useful in analysing seemingly non-political phenomena by demonstrating their underlying social and economic contradictions that emanate from what is political.

The critical perspective encompasses those proposals that are most often based on the premises and inspirations of various, usually leftist, or more specifically post-Marxist scholars, such as Chantal Mouffe, Ernesto Laclau, Jacques Rancière, who use the concept of "the political" explicitly. It allows them to demonstrate that certain seemingly non-political phenomena are in fact political, and therefore entangled in antagonistic arrangements of social relations as well as relations of power and domination. Moreover, through this concept, it is possible to understand that certain phenomena are excluded as political precisely to remove them from public debate by reducing their antagonistic character (e.g. the critical approach to post-politics).

Unlike researchers who regard "the political" primarily as an aspect, scholars such as Mouffe or Rancière most often juxtapose or at least clearly distinguish "the political" from politics. While politics camouflages fundamental contradictions, "the political" allows them to be revealed; while politics is the sphere of conventional political, most often partisan, action, "the political" is revealed in social grassroots practices; while politics is the sphere of the naturalisation of public order, framing it through the prism of "the political" deprives it of the quality of necessity. Within the framework of this approach, drawing on various inspirations and constructing the foundation of their own theoretical programme, a number of Polish scholars have commented on the usefulness of the concept of "the political" in theoretical studies of various seemingly non-political phenomena. For example, Magdalena Ozimek (2014), Kamil Minkner (2012), Filip Biały and Joanna Jastrzębska (2014) dealt with the political nature of art and popular culture. In Minkner's case, but also in Ozimek's, one can see the influence of British cultural studies, in which one of the premises is that culture is intrinsically political because it is a real arena for conflicts over the dominant meanings in public space between hegemonic and counter-hegemonic discourses. The critical potential of the category of "the political" was also shown in the collective work by Bartłomiej Krzysztan, Wojciech Ufel and Mateusz Zieliński (2016). Their perspective involved deconstructing the relations

of power and knowledge based on the example of practising science in Poland. In their view, this also applies to political sciences, which is expressed in institutional conditions, methodological orientations and claims to objectivity.

I refer to the third approach within the strategy under discussion as normative. Unlike the previous perspective, this one concerns desirable, approvingly expressed visions of public order. A special sample of this type of approach was given in Polish political sciences by Laska, who, in his integral theory of politics and “the political”, linked these concepts to the axio-normative sphere; and what appeared to be especially close to him was the principle of justice (2017, pp. 83–87). He even considered “the political” to be the concretisation of justice in the public sphere, since, in his view, all phenomena will be political if they involve the (both conflictual and compromise-based) control of common resources. According to Laska, what is at stake in this type of activity is such a distribution of resources that will ensure the security of different individuals. I see here the logic of the argumentation of Ágnes Heller with her notion of “the political” as freedom in the public sphere and that of Hannah Arendt, who regarded “the political” as a manifestation of interaction between individuals. References to John Rawls and his concept of justice are also clear.

Irrespective of the three approaches discussed, there are also some concepts that can be considered separate, as they do not fit directly into any of the three traditions but take into account each of them. I think that this type of approach was proposed by Młyńczyk (2015). He took inspiration on the subject of “the political” perceived antagonistically from both Schmitt and Mouffe, and at the same time transformed it enough to build a concept that is liberal in spirit, non-conflictual, and offers some normative potential. Młyńczyk’s theoretical exemplification was “the political” of two classes as ideal types: the idle and the creative. According to the author, it is not antagonism or mobilisation, but rather expression that turns out to be crucial in their formation, which allows a given class to express its goals and methods of achieving them, and therefore it is expression that turns out to be politically primary. Thus, “the political” for this researcher is ontological in character, but it concerns the self-identification of groups, not antagonisms. According to Młyńczyk, the establishment of a particular group does not necessarily target the existence of another group. Moreover, the positions of individual classes are not obvious. The dialectic of Młyńczyk’s approach makes it possible to realise that the idle may turn out to be creative and the creative may be idle.

In concluding my reflection on “the political”, I would like to emphasise that, whether it is a reflection oriented towards the qualities of what is political or certain structural assumptions concerning society or power relations, “the political” has allowed for a more dynamic and relational way of looking at what is political. The ascendancy of the concept of “the political” in the scholarly discourse is reflected, in my view, in three related trends. Firstly, there are analyses in which

researchers attempt to reconstruct, as it were, "the political" within other concepts that did not use the term. Applying this logic of argumentation, Łukasz Błaszczkiewicz (2012) found manifestations of "the political" in, e.g., Talcott Parsons. The second trend is the presence of the issue of "the political" in textbooks and studies in the field of political theory, which have a descriptive and reviewing character rather than a conceptual and research one. This may indicate that the notion under discussion is already a permanent element of the theoretical heritage of Polish political scientists (Koziełło et al., 2014). Thirdly, the notion of "the political" has begun to be applied in a wide variety of more detailed analyses of specific issues. I can refer here to my own research, where the tool of "the political" has proved effective in analysing not only political films (Minkner, 2012) but also conspiracy theories (Minkner, 2017b).

Notions and expressions synonymous to politics and "the political"

The processes of politicisation of an ever-increasing number (and range) of social phenomena, as well as the far-reaching specialisation and fragmentation of these processes, caused the notion of "the political" to become insufficient over time. Being malicious and following Sławomir Czapnik's example (2014), one could say that, in practice, this concept too often turned out to be merely an element of a discourse about discourses, which undermined the ability to perceive real social antagonisms. However, looking kindlier at the popularisation of the notion of "the political" and the accompanying proposals for new terms to name the most important types of political phenomena, one can argue that these terminological endeavours are to a large extent a way of dealing with the contemporary complexity of manifestations of "the political". In such a perspective, the notion of "the political" has not so much failed to live up to expectations, as we have come to realise that, as in the case of politics, the category of "the political" only refers to a certain group of problems, or to talking about them in a particular way. These assumptions were brilliantly expressed by Kaczmarek, according to whom it is necessary to constantly identify various political phenomena "not because of any immanent, universal qualities of politics or "the political", but according to the interference, entanglements and influence of various dimensions of social life, changing contexts, contradictions, conflicts of interest, forms and manifestations of the distribution of power and rule" (2017, p. 76). Hence, what is necessary is a constant need for naming, which, in my opinion, is expressed today in three main strategies.

Searching for a superordinate notion

Given the increasing number of notions referring to different political phenomena, there was a need to look for a superordinate notion. Initially, it might have seemed that the concept of “the political” would fulfil such a function. However, it soon became apparent that it would not be entirely possible to make “the political” a superordinate category because, as I have shown in the previous section, the factual application of this category in analyses went in a completely different direction. Consequently, a gap emerged, and researchers started to bridge it, using various methods.

First, they were looking for superordinate notions that considered the word’s etymology. The most distinctive case in point here may be the complex terminological construct of “what is political”, which researchers (see: Czajowski, 2013) use as if it were some umbrella or bracket to name and group very different types of politically significant phenomena – in politics, outside politics, borderline phenomena, as well as “the political”. However, there is also a problem with the construct under discussion. Some researchers (see: Skarzyński, 2020, p. 105) consider this construct as synonymous with the notion of “the political” rather than a separate construct. Ozimek also made an additional caveat that what is political allows one to name those phenomena whose political character does not result from belonging to politics.

Some researchers look for superordinate notions based on some general assumptions about political sciences. Consequently, they choose such a key term that defines as closely as possible, but also considering adequate capacity, those manifestations of political life that are close to these assumptions. For example, for Ziemowit J. Pietraś (1998), “decision” was such a concept. He believed all aspects of politics could be expressed by means of this category. In practice, we deal with decisions and non-decisions; acts of will that are individual as well as structurally and systemically conditioned; rational and emotional. Another notion of this type is “action”. It was used by Czajowski to build a whole typology of various political phenomena, which is discussed further in the text. The shortcoming of both these categories, from the point of view of the issues I discuss, is their excessive concreteness. For this reason, what occurs is reverse tendencies that involve the search for a broader category. For example, many researchers regard “political phenomenon” as a superordinate concept. But also in this case, there is a problem. This concept derives from the language of objectivist cognitive perspectives within which researchers focus their efforts on the actual manifestations of political life. Meanwhile, in the interpretationist perspective, there is no such thing as an independent phenomenon, instead there are only competing interpretations of given meanings. Besides, the notion of “political phenomenon” is perhaps too capacious. It is also, perhaps surprisingly, rather poorly conceptualised, and researchers use it rather intuitively.

Another interesting opportunity to develop a superordinate notion is offered by the term "field", due to its lack of numerous associations and connotations. In Polish political theory, it was promoted by Blok (2009, p. 55 and next; 2013, pp. 47–49), who applied it to not so much some areas as certain groups of interactions. Each of them has some specificity and is based on an objective arrangement of positions within different types of collective action imbued with power relations and inequalities in the distribution of capital. The author assumed the functioning of the following four superordinate and politically relevant fields: economic activity; state activity (state institutions); provision of information and education; as well as civic activity related to associations. A relevant field of politics is the resultant of the intersection of these different fields, whereby two, three or four fields may intersect. The core of politics, i.e. those phenomena that are characterised by the highest degree of political intensity, is at the intersection of all the fields. For Blok, politics is a heterogeneous field, and thus denotes both a specific type of activity and a sphere of social relations. In both cases, what is political goes beyond conventionally understood politics. The lowest degree of political intensity is assigned to so-called "political marginalia", i.e. social practices that do not belong to any of the fields but can be politicised.

The notion of field seems extremely interesting as a direction in searching for a superordinate notion, as it is relatively capacious, allows phenomena to be framed in a relational way, and enables political phenomena to be modelled transparently at a high level of intellectual abstraction (which, of course, can also constitute a disadvantage). In this way, we do not have to rely on arbitrarily imposed distinctions of different political phenomena but can delineate them thanks to a single superordinate principle. The notion of field also allows for the indication of not only different types of phenomena, but also their configurations, entanglements, and interdependencies.

Transformations of the notion of politics

Although the notion of politics is no longer the only one, or the most collective, or superordinate, it is still a key element in the political theoretical discourse regarding the identification of different manifestations of what is political. As we have seen, it also continues to be a point of reference in defining various notions, including "the political". One of the more interesting strategies to salvage this notion, but at the same time to make it more nuanced, is different kinds of transformations of politics as a stand-alone notion. I can see at least two groups of solutions here. The first group includes various kinds of clarifications and adjectival refinements. I am by no means referring to public or sectoral policies, but to various proposals for theoretical approaches to types of politics. For example, within the totality of political practices, Karwat (2004, pp. 22–28) distinguished particularist politics (pursuit of one's own interests), organic politics (pursuit of

the common good) and self-serving politics (politics for the benefit of one's own social environment) and the performance of social tasks (involves thinking in terms of the whole system).

The second group of transformations of the notion of politics involves adding various prefixes. Sometimes these prefixes reflected to a considerable degree the idea of building an entirely separate theoretical paradigm linked at the same time to an attempt to categorise political phenomena comprehensively in such a new approach. One example is the notion of "biopolitics", which by no means refers only to bioethical problems or phenomena on the borderline between biology and politics, but expresses a far-reaching shift in contemporary politics away from the pursuit of socio-economic interests towards the holistic management of problems of the body, life, health, death; it is a shift from the people, or even society, towards the population and the species – their reproduction and survival. In Poland, this discourse was joined by, among others, the author of this text, who was analysing the issues of post-humanism and trans-humanism (Minkner, 2017a), and Ścigaj (2022), who undertook a reflection on the phenomenon of dehumanisation.

Among the operations with prefixes, one can also mention those that serve to capture specific manifestations of what is political in those areas that are often considered non-political. Conceptualised at one time by Karwat (2004, p. 29 and next), the term "metapolitics" can be viewed in such categories. In his approach, it is the perception of politics not from a particularist, biased or even moralistic point of view, but from a position of exercising social control over politics as such, establishing certain limits and proposing universal solutions to minimise risks and threats affecting all participants in the social system. While many of these actions may seemingly appear to be non-political, or more specifically axiological, religious or ethical, Karwat showed that metapolitical actions are also carried out by political actors to protect their own interests. I think that the concept of metapolitics at least partly fits into the notion of "the political" in the sense of the criteria for the establishment of society. However, whereas "the political" in this sense is primarily concerned with rudimentary social relations, which, as a matter of fact, are often sublimated and masked at the ontic level of politics, the level of metapolitics is more explicative and is formulated directly. Nevertheless, it is often connoted non-politically, for example as a set of moral rules. But its political character can be unveiled by applying the category of "the political".

A particularly important aspect of the transformation of the notion of politics is the attempts to develop such cognitive constructs that will be adequate to name contemporary developments with regard to politics. In this way, Młyńczyk (2015, p. 151) used Beck's notion of sub-politics and intertwined it with "the political". In his view, sub-politics, which includes various grassroots civic movements, expert discourses, science, business, and representatives of the technology

sector, becomes the input of "the political" and thus feeds its content. Monika Wichłacz (2012), on the other hand, uses the notion of network politics to properly name the processes of erosion of the once stable boundaries of "the political" system in favour of creating politics at the micro level. The author believes that a characteristic feature of these changes is the propagation of various forms of multi-level governance that are based on negotiation rather than control.

Finally, to conclude this thread, let us list those conceptual transformations that are assessed critically by researchers, due to the rejection of the vision of politics with which the name is associated. This is how he Laska (2013) dealt with the notion of post-politics. He considered this term unfortunate because it implies living in the post-politics era, which, in his opinion, is patently untrue. In Laska's view, the suggestion by academics themselves that modern politics has become post-politics may, in effect, lead to the suppression of what is political. Even if we accept that the era of the dispute among grand political narratives has ended, there are still various conflicting visions of how to use common resources.

Laska's remarks on post-politics are interesting in the context of assessing the general transformation of the notion of politics discussed here. In my view, while these operations make it possible to express various specific aspects or manifestations of what is political, at the same time, doing so, we often run the risk of falsifying or sublimating the mechanisms of political life, for example by diluting real social contradictions. Public politics is not technocratic management of social problems based on objective knowledge, because "the political" understood antagonistically is inherent in it, and similarly (Minkner, Ozimek, 2014), post-politics, sub-politics, network politics are thoroughly political for the same reason. And doubly so because they also mask "the political". This is brilliantly illustrated by the concept of the non-political. On the surface, it may seem that this notion refers to non-political phenomena, but it is largely a matter of camouflaging "the political", i.e. using political phenomena as if they were non-political. Also, there is another problem with the notion of post-politics. It should be remembered that the main theorists of this concept (Beck, Giddens) did not see the notion of post-politics. Therefore, one should always identify the source of the elaboration of a given term and whether it is used by the proponent of a given vision or its critic.

Reconfiguring the boundaries of what is political

Among the strategies defining various manifestations of what is political, one of those that should be considered significant concerns the naming of those political phenomena that have been previously treated as non-political, or are new to politics, or operate in the various borderline spheres between politics and

non-politics. Therefore, given the fluidity of these boundaries, there is a need to understand the processes of dynamic transitions between what is political and what is non-political. In this way, some scholars have addressed the problem of politicisation.

In the Polish literature on the subject, this issue was elaborated the most thoroughly by Karwat, Ziółkowski (2013, pp. 356–357; Karwat, 2010, pp. 70–71, 84–87), who dealt with both the process of politicisation in general and its specific forms such as various syndromic interdependencies between political and non-political phenomena and between different types of exclusively non-political phenomena. He indicated both occasional and spontaneous politicisation, political actors' assigning political significance to hitherto non-political phenomena, the particularist appropriation by one political force of a common heritage and the desire of political actors to politically control various areas of life. These considerations make it possible to understand once again that “the political” is an aspectual feature of phenomena and not their substantive property, and thus, that also non-political phenomena are susceptible to being politically evaluated, to acquiring political significance, or to becoming an element of politics.

As an aside, we should add that the literature on the subject does not indicate a consensus on whether the process under discussion should be referred to as making something political or politicisation. Ryszard Herbut (1999, pp. 55–56) tends to use the term politicisation (and applies it to the organisation and institutionalisation of collective interests), while Karwat opts for making something political, but for him the term “politicisation” is synonymous. In contrast, Laska (2017, pp. 85–86) clearly distinguishes between the two notions. According to him, making something political is a process in which connections between politics and phenomena that do not naturally belong to politics are disclosed. Politicisation, on the other hand, is a narrower process and refers, within the processes of making things political, to the subordination of phenomena to the functions of politics. A separate element of this issue is the question of political entanglement, as developed by Karwat (2014). This entanglement concerns the restraint of agency expressed by and resulting in a given actor's asymmetrical network dependence on politics affecting the actor's ability to take action, which the actor is unable to change on their own. This issue is linked to politicisation, as it is not uncommon for the political entanglement of a non-political actor to result in the assignment of a political meaning to their works (e.g. artistic works).

Over time, the analysis of the processes of politicisation and the border areas of politics triggered the question of the possibility of the occurrence of depoliticisation processes, i.e. the loss of political significance in the case of a phenomenon that previously had a political status. The most comprehensive and insightful analysis of this issue in the Polish literature was presented by Ścigaj (2022). In his opinion, depoliticisation can appear in two main forms. The first form is

described as integrative because it concerns a situation in which an issue ceases to be a political dispute and becomes, for example, a national problem. The other form is described by Ścigaj as disintegrative. It concerns the processes of depriving the opponent of agency, which may be part of a strategy aimed at their dehumanisation. At the same time, the author drew attention, in a kind of dialectical manner, to the relativity of the boundaries between what is political and what is non-political. As a result, the process of depoliticisation may simultaneously trigger the process of making phenomena political.

On the other hand, given the dynamics of politicisation processes, in the literature on the subject there have been proposals to typologise phenomena that were marginally political or apparently non-political.

The first category of borderline political phenomena was proposed many years ago by Kazimierz Opalek (1975, p. 33), who singled out phenomena of political significance. According to Opalek, these are various events that are unintentional but have political consequences (e.g. a natural disaster) or intentional actions, but without awareness of political consequences (e.g. the discovery of natural resources in a given country). Individual actions that are deliberately politically oriented (e.g. a philosopher's voice for world peace) are a special case of such phenomena. Two new categories of non-obvious political phenomena were proposed subsequently by Karwat (2010, pp. 73–75). On the one hand, he discussed secondary or contextual political phenomena. This very heterogeneous group of phenomena includes all possible social phenomena that, for some reason, have been linked (at least temporarily) to the mechanisms of political life. Karwat lists such linkage criteria as: producing effects in political life; fulfilling political functions; political context; political significance; entanglement in a political dispute or struggle, but also an opportunity or pretext for political action. On the other hand, developing Bodnar's idea, Karwat also distinguished para-political phenomena. These are almost political phenomena, located close to what is political, encountering the regularities of politics, or showing similar mechanisms in non-political spheres, but not being strictly political. Another contemporary researcher Czajowski (2013, pp. 54–69) also distinguished two types of political phenomena outside conventional politics. Some of them are quasi-political actions taken for political reasons, causing political consequences and politicised actions. This type is largely similar to secondary and contextually politicised phenomena in Karwat's typology. In addition to this, Czajowski also distinguished peripheral political actions that are closely related to political actions but have their own division of tasks and competencies. They are primarily actions taken by administrative bodies, courts and social organisations. These phenomena correspond primarily to para-political phenomena in Karwat's typology.

The individual propositions complement each other very well and allow one to capture a wide range of less obvious political phenomena and their

configurations. In each case, however, there was a lack of more in-depth reflections on the relation of the isolated phenomena to “the political”, as well as an organisation and hierarchisation of the various concepts that appear in the discourse on what is political together with an attempt to work out a superordinate notion for them.

Conclusions

The disquisition presented in the text was intended to provide arguments for two fundamental theses. The first concerned the complex (hybrid, syndromic) status of political phenomena as well as their numerous new forms and types that emerged under the influence of politicisation processes. In the article, I tried to justify that it is these processes that are at the root of the terminological revival of the central categories of political sciences, which was reflected in both the popularity of the issue of “the political” and numerous proposals for new categories or the transformation of the old ones (first of all, the category of politics itself). On the other hand, the analysis presented in the text was intended to show that the terminological reflection undertaken by Polish political scientists was not a sterile dispute over words, but turned out to be extremely important from the point of view of rearranging the theoretical discourse on the preliminaries of political sciences, especially by raising the awareness and self-awareness of the political science community in Poland with regard to the scope of the subject matter of their discipline and changes in its area. The disputes were, therefore, not only theoretical, but also metatheoretical and even philosophical in nature. It seems that the theoretical disputes resulted primarily in the following: (1) expanding our understanding of what is political to include many new types of phenomena; (2) reflecting on the boundaries between what is political and what is non-political (or seemingly non-political and seemingly political); (3) becoming aware of the relationship between “the political” and synonymous notions and other notions related to what is political (for example between “the political” and politics); (4) reviewing disputes about what is political against the background of other conceptual disputes in the theory of politics.

However much was done, I think the analysis presented above also allows us to outline forthcoming challenges. It is primarily about further efforts to bind, organise and integrate the scattered categories and notions regarding different political phenomena. At the same time, it is worthwhile to make a typologising effort to refer in particular to less obvious political phenomena that function rather on the periphery of conventionally understood political life (e.g. in the sphere of nature, culture, technology). It also seems to me to be particularly important to link the notions of “the political” and “what is political”. What does it

really mean that something is political, and what does it mean that we can attribute the status of "the political" to that something? Another issue is to find, in the set of notions relating to political phenomena, one notion that could be considered a superordinate notion, in the sense that it is an umbrella concept allowing one to capture collectively different types of political phenomena.

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