

## Could we speak of a “Social Sin” of Political Science?: A Critical look from the Systemic Perspective.

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### Introduction

Could current political analysis be committing a serious social sin?. Could it be unconsciously drifting towards the analysis of what is secondary as opposed to what is relevant? Could it have forgotten too often the ultimate aim for which states and governments exist or were created?. Should not these questions be asked, not to underestimate what it has done until now, but to claim and foster what it could also undertake? Political Science’s hypothetical “social sin” would have two dimensions: the first concerns its **socio-ethical** and anti-humanistic consequences (not to see politics from the point of view of the man in the street); the second is **epistemological**, for its focus on partial parts of political systems (forgetting mainly their overall efficiency in terms of Universal Human Rights as an interrelated set). The problem is to abandon practically the final aim for which the polity was created, that is to say: 1) To increase the sum of individual global satisfactions of its needs; and 2) To reduce differences between these individual global satisfactions. But it seems that this final and only aim of the polity does not worry too much about the established Political Science.

To start, the key question is: Why have individuals been forming cooperative relationships since the beginning of time? Surely for one sole reason: *individuals work together to better meet their needs*, There could hardly be a more succinct answer.

Assuming that this is the initial motivation, it would be the “expectations of reaching higher degrees of satisfaction”, and such *expectations* alone, that would explain the ultimate aim of living in society through some kind of political organization.

They would, in a word, represent the “cement” that binds and the force that galvanizes durable societies and polities, inevitably driving individuals to inter-relate with different degrees of intensity and establishing among them an initial attraction that is not necessarily strictly rational. The intensity of that drive is what later makes associations among individuals endure.

The next step must necessarily be to specify such needs or requirements based on Universal Human Rights. Initially and from an intuitive vantage, it does not appear to be particularly difficult to ascertain that people, regardless of time or place, pursue values such as: good physical and mental *health*; a certain level of *material well-being*; *safety* from danger and contingencies; a *knowledge* and understanding of the world around them; *freedom* of movement and expression; perceived *justice* in the distribution of the available goods; life in *harmony with nature*; full *development of one's personality* as an intelligent and creative being; being *loved* or admired by others; and finally to have sufficient *power* to survive in a competitive world. These ten requirements (based on Maslow's needs) would constitute a Reference Pattern based only on so-called “universal” needs, or needs common to the human race and distinguishable from a much broader spectrum of so-called cultural needs. And they form a very well known suite of natural rights generated on the basis of the most innate and desirable of human aspirations.(see the concept of *Reference Pattern of Values* in Parra-Luna,(1983)).

This initial list of human needs, or any other regarded to be better founded, should be built into a theoretical model that should in turn be appropriate for the systematic definition and measurement of the efficiency of political systems.

### **The role of the “need/value” dyad in Political Science**

Such levels of satisfaction of needs can only be attained by producing the values that represent them. Here we might cite anthropologist C. Kluckhohn for whom “**value** and **need** are two sides of the same coin”; i.e., each need is met by producing the respective value. All the foregoing can be summarized in the following syllogism:

1. People are, by nature, *needy*.
2. If they form societies and political organizations it is *solely* to better meet their requirements through the greater individual efficiency attained.

3. Therefore the “political efficiency” concept is the construct that *explains* the existence of any polity and, therefore, all political science deriving from the need to understand and improve such efficiency.

However, Political Science seems to have definitively abandoned the study of political units as such. And if Political Science –the science of political groupings – doesn’t attend to this question, who will? Because of the division of scientific-academic fields, each of the specialities studying *social phenomena* ultimately explores and analyzes its respective tree, but none sees the forest as a whole. Specifically, what we should take into account as an object of research is the “*added productivity* gained by a polity as a result of its mere existence”. Any study of that productivity should be based on the fundamental equation of basic efficiency  $T=Y/X$  where “*Y*” is the Outputs, and “*X*” the Inputs, and from where:

1. **The structure of *Y* insofar as it describes a complex comprising theoretical dimensions *D* and empirical indicators “*y*”.** Formally:  $Y = f(D1, D2, \dots Dn)$  where  $Di = f(y1, y2, \dots yn)$ . The result in some standardized terms (f.i., 0-100) is an axiological profile (or “system of values”) depending on the relative accent put on each one of the indicators defining also the kind of ideological regime. Any political system must, then, be aware of its objectives. If they are unknown or unforeseen, if they are not compared, the theoretical understanding of the political unit may be deficient or spurious and its government politically reprehensible, due to the failure of analysts and politicians to take account of the needs of the members of the unit and the degree to which they are met.
2. **The understanding of *X* in terms of the resources used, *m*.** Formally:  $X = f(m1, m2, \dots mn)$ . Any political unit must be aware of the resources it uses and their total cost to obtain the above objectives (*Y*), a measure of utmost ecological or negentropic interest.
3. **The final understanding of *T* in terms of *Y* and *X* in the expression  $T= Y/X$ ,** where, by virtue of the prior standardization of indicators (between 0-100) for averaging, if  $T>1$ , positive transformation takes place; if  $T<1$ , transformation is negative; and if  $T=1$ , it is neutral.

Neglecting any of these three dimensions constitutes a very serious omission. The soft-focus vision of scientific specialities (Ortega and his “barbarian specialists” necessarily come to mind) and the resulting segmented study of society can be likened

to analyzing the separate parts of an engine before it is put together: the unity, operation and purpose of the engine as a whole and the *raison d'être* of its parts are lost in the analysis. This is the more galling, because the population votes for or chooses its politicians, for the exclusive purpose of fulfilling this neglected duty. The duty of presenting the overall “system of values” which has been performed, in comparison with the “system of values” politically promised, is therefore essential.

### **What of the socio-political systemic approach?**

A genuine systemic approach (the understanding of the global system) obliges the analyst to consider:

- a) The ultimate end of the system, which cannot be other than the best possible satisfaction of the citizen's needs (Y).
- b) Due to the transforming structure of systems (Inputs (X)→Transformation(T)→Outputs(Y)), the ultimate end or “system of values” (Y) should be known.
- c) This knowledge can be worked out in a quantitative form through operational definitions and empirical indicators, both objective (facts) and subjective (opinions).
- d) The relationship  $T=Y/X$  allows to calculate a first basic notion of “Political Efficiency” which can be useful for time and even space comparisons.

These would be the minimum requirements of a systemic approach to the political system. But in spite of some past efforts in this direction, the problem has not been undertaken seriously. Professionally, this leads us to a disquieting conclusion. We do not even know why the polity exists. Or what could be more serious: it seems that we prefer not to face this question if we have to look at the political system from the perspective of the man in the street.

### **Is there an alternative?**

It can be argued that it is both complementary and urgent to tackle the problem of the concept of “political efficiency” in its two main dimensions: first, the description and measurement of the expression “Y” which is always a “system of values”; and second, its explanation through the complex set of variables that represent “X” and “Y”,

and mainly their relationship “ $T=Y/X$ ” which is the political (organizational efficiency) dimension par excellence. A four-step strategic program could then be developed:

- a) To reconsider whether the pursued set of OUTPUTS (Y) of any political structure is *the most significant dimension* from the sociological point of view (of the man in the street), and therefore also political and ideological.
- b) To reconsider whether these OUTPUTS can be represented by the Referential Pattern of Values composed of the ten following universal values insinuated above: *Health; Security; Wealth; Knowledge; Freedom; Distributive Justice, Conservation of Nature; Quality of Activities; Moral Prestige; and Power.* (see their operational definitions in Parra-Luna and Garmendia, 2016)
- c) To reconsider whether the level of achievement of each one of these values can be quantified following *Lazarsfeld’s methodology from the concepts to complex indexes.*
- d) To reconsider whether *a basic notion of “political efficiency” could be measured by the expression  $Y/X=Outputs/Inputs$ .* Although there can be more subdimensiones of the ultimate concept of “Political Efficiency” such as Efficacy, Effectiveness, Ecological Performance, Environmental Adaptation and others. (see Parra-Luna, 2016)

If these re-considerations could confirm this possibility, Political Science could make an important and decisive step forward. Any polity (f.i., the Nation-State) could be subdivided (because of its fractal property) into a multitude of political organizations, big and small, simple and complex, (from the very small town to the global polity) and all of them could be analyzed through this new “transforming” approach where the general rule would be  $T=Y/X$ . The Humanistic Political Science’s main concern, then, would logically be, to understand how to achieve the best possible *value system* (Y) for each one of the subpolitical systems at the minimum ecological cost (X), for the benefit, of course, of their individuals as human beings.

Having reached this point, it is unavoidable to ask: How is it possible that Political Science, does not take into account, precisely, the motives for which individual people forms political associations? How is it possible to forget that all political systems can produce only those universal values which are pursued by people?. How is it possible that Political Science does not account for and measure the levels at which these different values are produced in order to be able to make rigorously any possible

criticism?. How is it possible to ignore the ethical dimension that supposes this not looking at the polity from the perspective of people, since it is people who pay?. And, if people live together and collaborate between them, is only for reaching a *better life*, (that is nothing but an “**integrated system of values**” or compatible levels of *health, wealth, security, freedom, equity, social prestige, etc.*) why then, do we not count, register, measure and compare, in a systematic and routine way, the “system of values” performed by any type of political system –their “raison d’etre”- from the small municipality to the nation-state? Is it so difficult?

The difficulties we may find, according to the specialized literature, is because we take as axiomatic the following mimetic principle: we consider that the expression  $T=Y/X$  is too general, too ambitious, and too unfashionable in the age of microanalysis of modern Physics and Biology, where to publish a good piece of research must be centered on a very small portion of the problem. And also because political scientists still add three outdated and comfortable fallacies:

- 1) It is not possible to agree on a single “Reference Pattern of Universal Values” that has to be performed by any kind of society or political organization, so that we could establish time and even space comparisons.
- 2) Even if we would agree on the universal values, we would not have enough and good quantitative data to define them operationally and validly. And
- 3) Even if we could define values validly, it would not be possible to work out a complex index ( $T=Y/X$ ) of political efficiency.

Three clear fallacies to show that most political analysis could be committing a grave social “sin” because they scorns, systematically, the only thing the voters are looking for: to improve globally their lives.

## **Conclusion**

The foregoing principles serve no other purpose than to provide a solid base (see Parra-Luna, 1983, 2000 and Parra-Luna and Garmendia 2016) for the operational possibilities of the concept of “political efficiency” given that most of the necessary

empirical indicators would be available. But, in a nutshell, the message of this summarized essay is:

*People organize politics only because they satisfy better their needs. However, Political Science, as the science of organizational government, is not sufficiently concerned with measuring these degrees of satisfaction through values produced by governments, thus ending by forgetting its ultimate goal. Is Political Science, therefore, playing its logical, epistemological and even ethical role? This is the question it would be worthwhile to answer.*

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## References

**At this stage, I do not consider it useful to present bibliographical references that do not add anything new. That is why I only present some of my works that could help to understand the main idea of this paper.**

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## Author note

Francisco Parra-Luna is full professor (emeritus) at the Universidad Complutense of Madrid. He has published several books and articles on the efficiency of social organizations, both public and privates, He has specialized in Systems Theory and Sociocybernetics and the democratic control of social and political systems, and related concepts such as efficiency, effectiveness, synergy and performance. He created the concept of *The Reference Pattern of Universal Values* as a tool for measuring the overall efficiency of social and political systems.

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