

Between Script, Synthesis and Canon: Czech Textbooks on the History of Political Thought in Political Science Education

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Abstract: *This article analyses Czech textbooks and synthetic texts on the history of political thought in political science education. Using qualitative content and genre analysis, it distinguishes five models in the Czech textbook landscape: the chronological-canonical model, political science-didactic course notes, ideological-theoretical synthesis, philosophical-historical compendium and expansive-cataloguing textbook. The central diagnostic case is the new textbook by Valeš, Květina and Sekerák, which significantly broadens the Czech canon by including non-European traditions, feminism, African political thought, biopolitics, environmentalism and artificial intelligence. The article argues, however, that the expansion of content does not automatically solve the didactic and disciplinary problem. In the modern and contemporary section, the new textbook at times produces a catalogue of authors and themes rather than an interpretative architecture of political problems. The article concludes that Czech political science has moved from a problem of scarcity to a problem of structure.*

Keywords: *history of political thought, political theory, textbook, political science, canon, Czech political science, political ideologies, cataloguing expansion*

Introduction

The history of political thought is a traditional component of political science education. Students of political science usually encounter authors such as Plato, Aristotle, Machiavelli, Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau, Kant, Hegel, Marx or Mill right at the start of their studies. Subsequent courses then frequently feature

Rawls, Arendt, Schmitt, Hayek, Foucault, authors of critical theory, feminist political theory, republicanism, communitarianism, or contemporary theories of democracy. At first glance, this seems an obvious part of the discipline: a political scientist should be familiar with the classical texts from which modern thinking on the state, power, sovereignty, legitimacy, representation, democracy, freedom, equality and justice has developed.

It is precisely this taken-for-granted nature, however, that is problematic. For it is not clear exactly what a political science student is supposed to learn when studying the history of political thought. Is it primarily about knowledge of canonical authors? An overview of the historical development of political ideas? An introduction to political philosophy? Preparation for the study of political ideologies? Or a way of showing students that the basic concepts of political science are not neutral technical terms, but historically shaped and normatively charged categories? This question is not merely didactic. It touches upon the very identity of political science as a discipline that moves between empirical research into politics, normative theory and the interpretation of historically variable political concepts.

In the international debate, the history of political thought can be understood in several ways. The contextual approach associated with the so-called Cambridge School emphasised that political texts cannot be read as timeless answers to ever-the-same questions, but as interventions in specific linguistic, intellectual and political contexts (Skinner 1969; Pocock 2009). Skinner's seminal text 'Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas' was published in the journal *History and Theory* in 1969 and became one of the foundational methodological texts of modern history of ideas. Pocock's later collection, *Political Thought and History*, summarises a broader methodological tradition that understands political thought through political languages and historical contexts. Alongside this are approaches that link political thought to the analysis of political concepts, ideologies and their morphological structures; Freedén's concept of ideologies as specific configurations of political concepts is particularly important here (Freedén 1996).

The Czech context, however, deals with these issues in a specific way. After 1989, political science was rapidly institutionalised as an independent academic discipline, but its textbook base developed gradually, unevenly and often in close connection with specific departments, courses and pedagogical needs. Yet the history of political thought was never entirely absent from the Czech context. There were lecture notes, overview publications, philosophically oriented syntheses, textbooks on political ideologies, and general introductions to political science. Nevertheless, it can be said that Czech political science has long lacked a generally accepted, widely applicable and at the same time clearly political-science-grounded textbook on the history of political thought.

The publication of the new textbook *Dějiny politického myšlení. Stát a politika od starověku po současnost* (*History of Political Thought: State and Politics from Antiquity to the Present*) therefore presents a suitable opportunity for broader reflection. It is not merely a question of whether this publication fills a certain gap in the market. More significantly, its publication reopens the question of what type of text Czech political science actually needs in this field. It is not enough to have a comprehensive overview of authors from antiquity to the present day. Nor is it enough to have a deeply specialised history of ideas if it is not readily applicable in basic political science teaching. And it is not enough to have lecture notes that serve one course excellently but have no ambition to create a broader disciplinary synthesis.

The aim of this article is therefore not to write a review of a single new textbook. The new textbook is understood here as a diagnostic case: as a text that allows us to reopen the question of how the history of political thought is constructed, taught and canonised in Czech political science. The article focuses on Czech textbooks and synthetic texts that deal with the history of political thought, political theories and political ideologies, and which can be linked to political science education. It primarily addresses three questions. Firstly, what canon of authors and topics these texts create. Secondly, what genre do they represent? Thirdly, to what extent are they able to teach the history of political thought as part of political science, rather than merely as the history of philosophy or a collection of historical facts?

The main argument of the article is as follows: the Czech problem of the history of political thought in political science lies not merely in a lack of textbooks, but in the tension between several distinct interpretative models. Some texts function as political science lecture notes, others as extensive philosophical-historical syntheses, and still others as overviews of political theories or ideologies. The new textbook by Valeš, Květina and Sekerák does not resolve this problem merely by filling a gap in the literature, but by simultaneously bringing it into sharper focus. It attempts to overcome the lack of synthesis by expanding the canon, yet it is precisely the modern and contemporary section that demonstrates how the breadth of the thematic scope can lead to a cataloguing approach to interpretation. The problem of Czech political science is therefore not merely a question of whether we have a sufficiently comprehensive textbook, but whether we can create a text that combines the breadth of the canon, interpretative depth, didactic usability and a clear political science architecture.

Textbooks as a canon and a tool for disciplinary socialisation

Textbooks are often understood as a secondary academic genre. Compared to monographs, scholarly articles or critical editions of classical texts, they appear as derivative, simplifying and didactically subordinate texts. Such a concep-

tion is, however, inadequate. A textbook is not merely a means of transmitting ready-made knowledge. It is also a tool for selecting, organising and authorising knowledge. In other words, a textbook not only informs about a particular field, but also helps to shape it.

This is particularly true in the field of the history of political thought. Every textbook in this field necessarily makes choices. It decides whether to begin with ancient Greece, or whether to include ancient non-European traditions as well. It decides whether to regard the Middle Ages as an important period in the development of political thought, or as an intermediate stage between antiquity and modernity. It decides whether modern political thought will be told as a story of liberalism, democracy and the state, or also as a story of empire, colonialism, gender inequality, religious conflict or social issues. It also decides whether women, non-European authors, Czech thinkers or contemporary critical currents will make it into the canon.

This selection is not neutral. Textbooks shape the idea of who is a 'classic', which questions are fundamental and what kind of argumentation students should consider relevant. If Plato, Aristotle, Machiavelli, Hobbes, Locke and Rousseau appear repeatedly in a textbook, but figures such as Mary Wollstonecraft, Hannah Arendt, Frantz Fanon, Michel Foucault or authors from the Central European tradition are absent, then students are not merely learning the history of political thought. They are also being taught a particular vision of the discipline. This image may be narrow, broad, Eurocentric, state-centric, liberal, republican, historical, philosophical or political-scientific.

The textbook therefore functions as a tool for disciplinary socialisation. It teaches students not only what they should know, but also how they should ask questions. In political science, this function is exceptionally important, as the relationship between political theory and empirical political science is not always self-evident. A student may learn that Hobbes is the author of the theory of the social contract and sovereignty. From a political science perspective, however, the more significant question is how Hobbes helps us think about security, the state, legitimate coercion, or fear as a political affect. Similarly, one can learn that Rousseau works with the concept of the general will. But what is also essential from a political science perspective is how this concept relates to representation, democracy, populism, participation, or the critique of inequality.

The difference between the history of authors and the history of political problems is fundamental here. The history of authors leads the student from one thinker to another. The history of political problems traces how questions of power, order, freedom, equality, legitimacy, citizenship, representation or conflict change over time. A good political science textbook on the history of political thought cannot, of course, ignore the authors. However, it should not merely retell their stories. Its task should be to show why these authors are important for political science.

In this regard, it is useful to distinguish several functions of a textbook on the history of political thought. The first is an orientational function: the student gains a basic overview of authors, works and periods. The second is a canonising function: the textbook determines which authors and texts are considered fundamental. The third is the interpretative function: the textbook shows how classical texts can be read and what issues can be analysed through them. The fourth is the disciplinary function: the textbook explains why the history of political thought is part of political science, and not merely the history of philosophy. It is precisely this last function that is often the weakest, and at the same time the most important for this article.

The Czech context: Between philosophy, political science and course notes

The Czech context is unique in that the history of political thought here did not develop within a single, clearly defined institutional framework. Various academic traditions have contributed to its interpretation: philosophy, political science, legal theory, history, sociology and, to some extent, civic education. This in itself is not a problem. Political thought is, by its very nature, an interdisciplinary field. The problem arises when it is unclear from which disciplinary perspective a textbook is written and what type of teaching it is intended to serve.

Philosophy-oriented texts can offer great interpretative depth, thorough engagement with primary sources and sensitivity to historical context. However, they may not be easily applicable in a basic political science course, the aim of which is to show students the relationship between political theories and the concepts of modern political science. Political science lecture notes, on the other hand, can be excellently tailored to a specific course, but their limited scope and connection to a single institution usually prevent them from becoming a more general synthesis of the discipline. Survey textbooks can offer a broad scope, but often at the cost of flattening arguments and reducing classic texts to a set of easily memorable theses.

This tension is well illustrated by Stulík's lecture notes *Dějiny evropských politických teorií* (*History of European Political Theories*). This is not a monumental synthesis of the history of political thought, but rather a textbook intended for a bachelor's degree in political science. It is precisely for this reason, however, that it is exceptionally important for analysis. In the introduction, the author explicitly articulates the problem facing political science students: it is not enough merely to know 'what is', but one must understand 'why', 'what it might mean' and 'what it is for' (Stulík 2016). The history of political theories is not presented here as an end in itself – a mere overview of the classics – but as a means to understanding political science as an interpretative discipline.

Stulík also explicitly states that his text is a teaching aid, not a comprehensive exam guide. He therefore does not aim to include as many authors as possible, but rather to provide a broader and more critical presentation of a limited selection. He links the selection of authors to the needs of the bachelor's programme in political science: Kant is important for theories of international relations and democratic peace, Plato and Aristotle for political systems, and Locke for the intellectual foundations of liberalism (Stulík 2016). Such transparency in the selection is valuable for the textbook genre, as it demonstrates that the canon is not self-evident, but rather constructed didactically and within the discipline.

Alongside this political science-didactic model stands the extensive philosophical-historical project *Dějiny politického myšlení* (*History of Political Thought*), published by OIKOYMENH. This represents a completely different type of text. Its strength lies in its scholarly depth, historical scope and careful reconstruction of intellectual contexts. Volume II/1 is devoted to political thought from its beginnings to the High Middle Ages, covering early Christianity, Augustine, Byzantine, Arab and Jewish political thought, the origins of Czech political thought, the conflict between secular and spiritual power, and Thomas Aquinas; it comprises 647 pages and was published in 2012. Volume II/2 covers the period from the crisis of the Middle Ages to the Reformation, including Dante, Ockham, Marsilius, Charles IV, Hus, the Hussite movement, Chelčický and the European Reformation; it has 519 pages.

The OIKOYMENH project thus fulfils a different function from a textbook for a bachelor's course. For political science teaching, it may be an indispensable specialist resource, but not necessarily a text that in itself structures a basic course in the history of political thought. The scope, expertise and historical depth here are not synonymous with textbook-like qualities. It is precisely the contrast between Stulík and OIKOYMENH that shows that the problem with Czech political science teaching does not lie in a simple lack of texts. There are both didactic texts and texts of great scholarly depth. The question is whether there exists a text that would convincingly combine both functions.

Another type is represented by political science syntheses associated, for example, with Lukáš Valeš. Valeš's *Dějiny politických teorií* (*History of Political Theories*), in the 2004 edition analysed here, aims to provide a clear overview of the history of political theories for political science students. Its ambition is not to achieve the same historical and philosophical depth as OIKOYMENH, but rather to create an accessible framework for navigating the main authors, periods and concepts. The structure of the content follows the classical European axis from ancient Greece and Rome through the Middle Ages, the Renaissance, 17th-century political thought, the French Enlightenment, the turn of the 18th and 19th centuries, to German classical philosophy (Valeš 2004). Here we see the typical tension inherent in an overview textbook: the broader the scope, the

greater the risk of oversimplification. On the other hand, it is precisely this type of text that best meets the practical needs of political science teaching.

A borderline case is the publication by Milan Lupták and Vladimír Prorok, *Politické ideologie a teorie. Od starověku po rok 1848 (Political Ideologies and Theories: From Antiquity to 1848)*. The book presents itself, in its own words, as an attempt to avoid the pitfalls of Eurocentrism in the interpretation of the history of political thought; alongside European traditions, it also includes the political views of ancient India, China, Israel, the Arab East, Byzantium, Kievan and Muscovite Rus, and Tsarist Russia. In doing so, it demonstrates that in the Czech context, the history of political thought often overlaps with the interpretation of political ideologies. This is understandable: liberalism, conservatism, socialism or nationalism cannot be properly explained without reference to historical authors and theories. At the same time, however, this model blurs the boundary between political theory, the history of political thought and ideological currents. For political science, such an interconnection may be useful; analytically, however, it is necessary to distinguish whether a textbook is tracing the history of arguments, the history of ideologies or the development of political concepts.

Corpus and method

This article is based on a qualitative analysis of the content and genre of selected Czech textbooks and synthetic texts that deal with the history of political thought, political theories or political ideologies and which can be linked to political science education. This is not a complete bibliography of all Czech publications in the field of political philosophy. The aim is to analyse texts that fulfil, or may fulfil, a textbook function in political science.

The main corpus includes texts representing five basic models. The first is the chronological-canonical political science textbook, represented by Valeš's *History of Political Theories* (Valeš 2004). The second are political science-didactic lecture notes, represented by Stulík's *History of European Political Theories* (Stulík 2016). The third are texts situated at the intersection of the history of political theories and political ideologies, particularly the publication by Lupták and Prorok (Lupták & Prorok 2011). The fourth type consists of extensive philosophical-historical syntheses, represented by the *History of Political Thought* project from the OIKOYMENH publishing house (Herold, Müller & Havlíček 2012a, 2012b; Kučera & Chotaš 2022a, 2022b). The fifth is the expansive-cataloguing model, the most striking example of which is the new textbook by Valeš, Květina and Sekerák (Valeš, Květina & Sekerák 2026). Additionally, the overview text *Dějiny politických filozofií (A History of Political Philosophies)* is also taken into account, which allows one to trace the older thematic structure of the exposition from antiquity to the 20th century (Syllaba 2005).

The analysis examines several dimensions. The first is the disciplinary framework: whether the text conceives the history of political thought as part of political science, philosophy, the history of ideas, legal studies or general social science education. The second is genre: whether it is a lecture notes, a textbook, a scholarly synthesis, a compendium or an overview of ideologies. The third dimension is the construction of the canon: which authors, periods and traditions are included, which are marginalised and which are absent. The fourth dimension is the political science nature of the interpretation: whether the text links historical authors with concepts of political science, such as the state, power, sovereignty, legitimacy, representation, democracy, citizenship or conflict. The fifth dimension is the didactic architecture: whether the text merely provides the student with information, or guides them towards interpretative and analytical work.

This approach does not evaluate textbooks according to a simple scale of quality. The aim is not to determine which publication is 'the best'. Individual texts fulfil different functions. A deeply specialised philosophical-historical synthesis cannot be assessed by the same criteria as a lecture note for a bachelor's course. Nevertheless, it is possible to ask what picture of the history of political thought these texts create and how they contribute to the shaping of political science education.

Five models of the Czech textbook landscape

Czech textbooks and synthetic texts on the history of political thought cannot be reduced to a simple dichotomy between the absence and presence of a textbook. The available corpus suggests instead a plurality of models that fulfil different functions. Some texts are primarily textbooks providing a basic introduction, others are lecture notes for a specific course, and others are specialist philosophical-historical syntheses or interpretations of political ideologies. The new textbook by Valeš, Květina and Sekerák adds a fifth type to these models: an expansive-cataloguing textbook that seeks to include as many authors, schools of thought and contemporary topics as possible. It is precisely this typology that demonstrates that the Czech textbook landscape is not empty, but rather heterogeneous in terms of genre.

The first model is the chronological-canonical political science textbook. It is well represented by Valeš's earlier textbook, *A History of Political Theories*. Its content is structured as a classic chronological timeline: political thought in ancient Greece, Rome, the Middle Ages, the Renaissance, the 17th century, 17th- and 18th-century France, the turn of the 18th and 19th centuries and in German classical philosophy (Valeš 2004). The exposition here follows the well-known European lineage from the Sophists, Socrates, Plato and Aristotle through Augustine, Aquinas, Machiavelli, Bodin, Hobbes, Locke, Montesquieu

and Rousseau to Tocqueville, Smith, Mill, Burke, Saint-Simon, Owen, Fourier, Kant, Fichte, Hegel and Marx. Importantly, the text also includes supplementary questions and suggestions for seminar papers, i.e. the didactic apparatus typical of a basic course textbook.

The strength of this model lies in its clarity. Students are provided with a map of the core European canon and learn to navigate the main periods and authors. Its weakness, however, lies precisely in its canonical narrowness. Non-European traditions, feminist political theory, most of 20th-century political thought and contemporary critical currents remain outside the main scope. This model therefore corresponds well to the older conception of an introductory course in political science, but less so to the current demand for a more pluralistic, global and problem-oriented interpretation.

The second model is the political science-didactic textbook. Its aim is not to create a definitive history of political thought or to cover the widest possible canon of authors, but to provide students with a basic orientation in political theories whilst showing them why these theories are important for political science thinking. This model is represented by Stulík's textbook *History of European Political Theories* (Stulík 2016). Its significance lies not in its scope, but in the explicit consideration of its didactic function. Stulík emphasises that political science students should not merely strive to master information, but to understand the relationship between political processes, norms, theories and interpretation.

Stulík's model is valuable precisely because of its selectivity. The author openly acknowledges that this is not a comprehensive exam guide, but a teaching aid. His aim is not to present as many authors as possible, but rather to examine a smaller number of authors in greater depth and from a critical perspective. The selection relates to the specific needs of a bachelor's degree programme in political science: Kant is important, amongst other things, for understanding theories of international relations and democratic peace; Plato and Aristotle for the research context of political systems; and Locke for understanding liberalism (Stulík 2016). This model thus demonstrates that didactic reduction need not be a weakness, provided it is transparent and justified in political science terms.

The third model is the ideological-theoretical synthesis. This type of text links the history of political theories with an interpretation of political ideologies. In the Czech context, it is represented in particular by Lupták and Prorok's publication *Political Ideologies and Theories: From Antiquity to 1848* (Lupták & Prorok 2011). Its content does not begin directly with ancient authors, but with a general section devoted to political ideology as an object of analysis: the concept of political ideology, the possibilities of true knowledge in politics, the emergence and development of political ideologies, and the relationship between ideology and modes of political thought. Only then does an exposition

of ancient and medieval political thought follow, including India, China, Israel, Greece, Rome, Christianity, Islam, Byzantium, Kievan and Muscovite Rus, and modern revolutions.

The advantage of the ideological-theoretical model is its proximity to political science, as modern political science cannot do without an explanation of liberalism, conservatism, socialism, nationalism, communism, fascism, anarchism or feminism. Here, the history of political thought is naturally intertwined with the history of modern political conflicts. A weakness is the risk that historical political thought will be read primarily as a precursor to modern ideologies. Authors may then become representatives of ideological currents rather than thinkers addressing more general questions of power, order, legitimacy, law, justice or citizenship.

The fourth model is the philosophical-historical compendium. In the Czech context, this is most notably represented by the project *History of Political Thought*, published by OIKOYMENH. Volume II/1 covers early Christianity, Tertullian, Augustine, the barbarian kingdoms, Byzantine political thought, the Byzantine mission to the Slavs, political thought in Muslim countries, Jewish political thought, the origins of political thought in the West, the origins of Czech political thought, the struggle between secular and spiritual power, and Thomas Aquinas (Herold, Müller & Havlíček 2012a). Volume II/2 continues with Dante, Ockham and Marsilius of Padua, the radical and secular currents of the 14th century, the state theology of Charles IV, the ideological roots of the Reformation in the Czech lands, Jan Hus, the Hussite movement, Petr Chelčický, Nicholas of Cusa and the European Reformation (Herold, Müller & Havlíček 2012b).

The later volumes III/1 and III/2 extend this model into the early modern period and the 19th century: Machiavelli, Erasmus, classical utopias, Jesenský, Comenius, Bodin, Suárez, Grotius, Hobbes, Harrington, Locke, Montesquieu and Rousseau in III/1; American political thought, Hume, Burke, Kant, Herder, Fichte, Hegel, utilitarianism, Tocqueville, utopian socialism, Marx, anarchism, Russian political thought, Nietzsche, Weber and 19th-century political thought in the Czech lands in III/2 (Kučera & Chotaš 2022a, 2022b). The strength of this model lies in its historical depth, academic rigour and the significant integration of Czech and Central European traditions. From the perspective of basic political science teaching, however, it is more of a reference resource than a textbook structured for a single undergraduate course.

The fifth model is the expansive-cataloguing textbook. It is most clearly represented by the new textbook by Valeš, Květina and Sekerák (Valeš, Květina & Sekerák 2026). Its scope is exceptionally broad: it begins with non-European political thought in antiquity – namely Egypt, Mesopotamia, China and India – continues with the classical European canon, and in the third part turns to political thought of the 20th and 21st centuries. It is precisely this third part that is key to the article. Within a relatively limited scope, it covers classical and

social liberalism, libertarianism, conservative critiques of liberalism, communitarianism, neo-republicanism, Arendt, Christian political thought, left-wing thought of the first and second halves of the 20th century, African political thought, feminism, postmodern currents, globalisation, climate change and AI.

This model addresses a long-standing shortcoming in Czech literature in a new way: not through selection and didactic focus, but through expansion. Its undeniable advantage is its topicality and the effort to extend the canon beyond the boundaries of the traditional European line. Its weakness, however, is the cataloguing effect. The more authors and topics are to be included in a single textbook, the more the exposition skims the surface. Modern political thought can then turn into a list of items, in which major themes are covered in the space of one or a few pages. Students learn that a particular author or school of thought exists, but they may not understand its logical structure, historical context or political science relevance.

This typology suggests that Czech political science faces a dilemma between didactic reduction and encyclopaedic expansion. The first model risks incompleteness, the second superficiality. The most productive solution in political science terms therefore lies neither in a return to a narrow European canon nor in the endless expansion of the list of authors, but in a more thoughtful architecture of interpretation: in linking the canon of authors with the history of political problems.

The canon and its boundaries

Every textbook on the history of political thought creates a canon. It does so not only through the selection of authors, but also through the way it orders, connects and interprets them. The canon is not merely a list of names. It is an implicit argument about what is considered essential for understanding politics. In the field of the history of political thought, this problem is particularly acute, as the selection of authors generally reproduces a certain conception of the development of Western political rationality: from the ancient polis through Christian and medieval thought, Renaissance realism, social contract theory, the Enlightenment, liberalism, conservatism and socialism to modern democracy and its critics.

The classical canon has its obvious advantages. Plato, Aristotle, Machiavelli, Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau, Kant, Hegel, Marx, Mill and Tocqueville are indeed authors without whom modern political thought is difficult to understand. The problem arises, however, when this canon is presented as natural and self-evident, rather than as the result of a selection. The textbook then conveys not only knowledge of the history of political thought, but also the notion that this particular line of thought constitutes the history of political thought as such.

Stulík's text is useful in this respect precisely because of its openness. His canon is distinctly European and classical, but the author simultaneously acknowledges that the selection is necessarily selective, subjective and influenced by the needs of a specific bachelor's programme (Stulík 2016). This is methodologically honest. The textbook canon does not present itself here as an exhaustive map of the entirety of political thought, but as a didactically justified selection. Such an approach may be more beneficial to students than seemingly neutral encyclopaedic comprehensiveness, as it demonstrates that any account of the history of political thought must answer the questions of why these particular authors and why in this particular context.

The OIKOYMENH philosophical-historical model, by contrast, expands the canon through depth and historical specialisation. Of particular importance is that it integrates into the account of medieval and early modern political thought traditions that are often marginalised in simpler political science textbooks: Byzantine, Arab and Jewish political thought, the Czech Reformation, the Hussite movement and the thought of Chelčický (Herold, Müller & Havlíček 2012a, 2012 b). This model demonstrates that 'European' political thought is not a homogeneous Western lineage leading from Athens to liberalism. It is shaped by a plurality of religious, legal, institutional and cultural contexts.

It is precisely the Czech dimension that is particularly important here. In the standard political science canon, Czech authors often appear either as a national add-on or as a special digression. Hus, Chelčický, Comenius, Bolzano, Masaryk, Patočka and Havel are often difficult to integrate into the main line of European political thought. This creates a peculiar paradox: Czech political science teaches the history of political thought predominantly as the history of the Western canon, whilst it often leaves its own Czech and Central European tradition aside or relegates it to specialised courses. Yet it is precisely the Czech and Central European context that can be exceptionally productive for political science: it raises questions of nationhood, the Reformation, religious conflict, citizenship, democracy in a small state, dissent, the intellectual's responsibility, and the relationship between morality and politics.

The new textbook by Valeš, Květina and Sekerák, by virtue of its content structure, already seeks to significantly expand the canon towards non-European traditions and contemporary authors. It does not begin, as is customary, with Greece alone, but includes non-European political thought in antiquity, including Egypt, Mesopotamia, China and India (Valeš, Květina & Sekerák 2026). In the third part, it then turns to political thought of the 20th and 21st centuries and includes, among others, Rawls, Dworkin, Shklar, Hayek, Nozick, Schmitt, Gentile, the Conservative Revolution, communitarianism, neo-republicanism, Arendt, Christian political thought, Lenin, Gramsci, the Frankfurt School, African political thought, feminism, Foucault, Agamben, Rancière, Laclau and Mouffe, globalisation, climate change and artificial intelligence. This ambition

is important because it transcends the older European canonical framework. However, merely expanding the list of authors and topics does not in itself mean overcoming the problem of textbook-like rigidity. What is decisive is whether these topics are integrated into a well-thought-out interpretative framework, or whether they become mere entries in a catalogue.

Here, three ways of expanding the canon can be distinguished. The first is decorative inclusion, where non-European or marginalised traditions are included so that the textbook does not appear too narrowly Eurocentric, but their presence does not alter the main interpretative line. The second option is comparative inclusion, where different traditions are compared in terms of concepts of power, order, law, legitimacy, governance or sovereign authority. The third and most challenging option is conceptual inclusion, where the inclusion of non-European or hitherto marginalised traditions transforms the very question of what constitutes the history of political thought. It is precisely this distinction that is appropriate to apply in a detailed analysis of the new textbook.

A similar question concerns women and feminist political theory. Traditional textbooks on the history of political thought have long been markedly masculine. It is not merely a matter of whether Mary Wollstonecraft, Harriet Taylor Mill, Hannah Arendt, Simone de Beauvoir, Carole Pateman or Susan Moller Okin appear in them. What is more important is whether feminist political theory is included in the narrative merely as a separate chapter, or whether it alters the interpretation of fundamental concepts such as citizenship, the private and the public, freedom, equality, justice, representation and power. The canon is not changed simply by adding a few names to the traditional list. It changes when new authors and new questions transform the way the whole is read.

The canon of Czech textbooks on the history of political thought must therefore be analysed on four levels. The first is the authorial level: who is included and who is omitted. The second is the spatial level: whether political thought is presented as a Western European, European, global or Central European narrative. The third is the temporal level: where the narrative begins and where it ends. The fourth is the thematic level: whether the history of political thought is organised around authors or around political issues. It is precisely this last level that is crucial for political science.

The political science nature of the narrative: From authors to issues

The fundamental question of this article is: when is the history of political thought taught from a political science perspective? The answer cannot simply lie in the fact that the text was produced in a political science department or is intended for political science students. The political science nature of the interpretation is manifested primarily in whether the textbook is able to link

historical authors with analytical concepts of political science. In other words, it is not merely a question of whether the student knows what Hobbes, Locke or Rousseau wrote, but whether they understand how their arguments help to comprehend the state, power, sovereignty, legitimacy, democracy, representation, citizenship or conflict.

A political science textbook on the history of political thought should therefore not merely be a history of authors. Nor should it be merely a history of ideas in the narrow philosophical sense. Its specific function lies in translating historical texts into the problematic language of political science without thereby flattening them ahistorically. This task is difficult. On the one hand, the historical context must be respected, as emphasised by the contextual approach of the Cambridge School (Skinner 1969; Pocock 2009). On the other hand, political science teaching has a legitimate need to show students why older texts are relevant to contemporary issues in political science. Textbooks must therefore balance historical sensitivity with contemporary analytical utility.

Stulík's example illustrates one possible approach. From the outset, the author links the exposition of political theories to the question of how political science interprets political processes, states and norms. Theories here are not isolated philosophical systems, but tools for understanding political phenomena. Stulík therefore emphasises that a political scientist must work not only with political realities, but also with theories and value-based interpretations of these realities (Stulík 2016). This approach is strong from the perspective of political science because it does not merely tell the student to 'learn the authors', but shows them why theories are part of the political science method of explanation.

At the same time, the limitations of this model are also evident here. If the text is organised primarily around authors, the political science issues remain largely dependent on the interpretation of the teacher or student. In other words, the textbook may indicate the political science relevance of each author, but it does not necessarily systematically trace the history of political thought across themes. An alternative would be a textbook organised not primarily chronologically, but thematically: the history of sovereignty, the history of representation, the history of citizenship, the history of democracy, the history of freedom, the history of equality, the history of legitimacy, the history of political conflict. Such a model is didactically very appealing in political science, but at the same time runs the risk of historical texts being taken out of context and used merely to illustrate contemporary concepts.

A political science textbook therefore cannot, in all likelihood, completely abandon chronology or authors. It should, however, supplement chronology with a problem-based framework. For each major section, it should be clear which political science problem is being addressed. Antiquity should not be merely 'Plato and Aristotle', but also the emergence of the question of citizen-

ship, the polis, constitutions, participation, and the relationship between politics and ethics. The Middle Ages should not be merely 'Augustine and Aquinas', but also the question of the relationship between secular and spiritual power, the legitimacy of authority, natural law and the universal order. The early modern period should not be merely 'Machiavelli, Hobbes and Locke', but also the problem of sovereignty, security, property, the contract and the modern state. The nineteenth century should not be merely 'liberalism, conservatism, socialism', but also the debate over democracy, the nation, civil society, capitalism and the social question.

This problematic architecture is also important for the present day. The history of political thought is not merely a museum of ideas. It is a reservoir of concepts through which we still understand politics today. Concepts such as sovereignty, representation, the people, the nation, citizenship, freedom, equality, security, justice or democracy are not self-evident. They have a history, conflicting meanings and normative baggage. The teaching of the history of political thought in political science should show students precisely this historical and conflictual nature of the basic concepts of political science.

From this perspective, the new textbook by Valeš, Květina and Sekerák is an important case study. The publisher's blurb presents it as a text that does not merely aim to be a catalogue of the classics, but is intended to facilitate an understanding of the present and even to 'peek behind the curtain of the future' (Valeš, Květina & Sekerák 2026). Such an ambition is significant in political science, but at the same time raises the question of how exactly it is realised. Does the textbook present the present through historical concepts? Or does the present serve rather as a rhetorical justification for why the classics should still be read? It is precisely this question that should be at the heart of a detailed analysis of the new textbook.

The new textbook must therefore be evaluated on a case-by-case basis according to its individual sections. Different criteria can be applied to the treatment of antiquity and the classical European canon, different ones to the section devoted to modern political ideologies, and entirely different ones to the section on political thought of the 20th and 21st centuries. It is precisely this last section that is the most ambitious, yet at the same time the most problematic: the attempt to include almost the entire contemporary canon means that the exposition occasionally turns into a catalogue of authors, schools of thought and themes.

The political science nature of the exposition can therefore be assessed according to several criteria. The first is conceptual coherence: the textbook should clearly demonstrate how the concepts of the state, power, sovereignty, legitimacy, citizenship, freedom, equality and democracy are formed by individual authors. The second criterion is analytical relevance: the exposition should help students understand why historical arguments are important for contemporary political science issues. The third criterion is historical sensitivity: a textbook

should not turn the classics into today's political scientists and rewrite their texts in the language of contemporary debates without regard for context. The fourth criterion is didactic clarity: students should understand not only what the author claimed, but also what problem they were addressing, against whom they were arguing and why their thinking remains relevant.

It is precisely at this point that the main argument of the article returns. Czech political science does not merely need another extensive overview of the history of political thought. It needs a textbook model that links the canonical authors with the problem-based structure of political science. Without this link, the history of political thought easily becomes either an encyclopaedia of the classics or a philosophical-historical specialisation detached from political science teaching. In both cases, their most important function is lost: teaching students that the basic concepts of political science have a history and that political thought is not an add-on to the discipline, but one of its fundamental ways of understanding politics.

Czech political science therefore faces not merely the question of whether it has a sufficiently comprehensive textbook on the history of political thought. It faces the question of how such a textbook should handle the canon, selection and depth. The most productive approach appears to be combining a chronological narrative with a problem-based framework: the history of political thought should not merely be a history of authors, but also a history of sovereignty, representation, citizenship, democracy, freedom, equality, security, the body, technology and political conflict. Only in this way can it become a genuine disciplinary part of political science education, rather than merely its historical or philosophical prelude.

The new textbook and the problem of cataloguing expansion

The new textbook by Valeš, Květina and Sekerák is the most significant case study within the analysed corpus. Not because it exhaustively addresses the problem of Czech approaches to teaching the history of political thought, but because it attempts to address several shortcomings at once: the absence of a current, comprehensive synthesis; the Eurocentrism of older textbooks; the weak presence of 20th- and 21st-century political thought; and the need to link the classical canon with contemporary political issues. Yet it is precisely this ambition that also reveals the limitations of the textbook genre.

The new textbook by Valeš, Květina and Sekerák represents an important milestone precisely because it seeks to overcome the limitations of older texts. It includes non-European ancient traditions, an extensive section on 20th- and 21st-century political thought, feminism, African political thought, postmodern currents, environmentalism and artificial intelligence. In doing so, it significantly expands the Czech textbook canon. At the same time, however, it demon-

strates that expanding the content is not the same as resolving the didactic and disciplinary functions of the textbook. The modern section at times resembles a catalogue of topics, in which major currents are given only minimal space.

The first part of the textbook signals a shift away from older chronological-canonical texts. The exposition does not begin solely with ancient Greece, but with non-European political thought in antiquity: the city and the state between reason and mystery, Egypt, Mesopotamia, China and India (Valeš, Květina & Sekerák 2026). This step is important because it undermines the notion that the history of political thought begins only with the Greek polis. At the same time, however, it raises the question of whether non-European traditions truly transform the overall interpretative logic of the exposition, or whether they merely precede the main European line.

The problem is even more evident in the section devoted to the 20th and 21st centuries. Its title – From social liberalism to biopolitics and AI – itself suggests an enormous scope. In quick succession, the text covers social liberalism, Berlin, Rawls, Dworkin, Shklar, Hayek, Rothbard, Nozick, Schmitt, Gentile, Spengler, the Conservative Revolution, Dávila, neoconservatism, paleoconservatism, post-liberalism, de Benoist, John Gray, communitarianism, neo-republicanism, Arendt, Christian realism, Catholic social teaching, Maritain, Lenin, Bernstein, Kautsky, Luxemburg, Gramsci, Austro-Marxism, Lukács, Althusser, Poulantzas, Debord, analytical Marxism, Alinsky, the Frankfurt School, African political thought, feminism, Foucault, Agamben, Vattimo, Rancière, Laclau and Mouffe, Naomi Klein, environmentalism, Latour and artificial intelligence (Valeš, Květina & Sekerák 2026). This section, conceived in this way, is exceptionally topical, yet at the same time necessarily cataloguing in nature.

By ‘cataloguing expansion’, I mean a situation where the textbook responds to the legitimate demand for a broader, more contemporary and more inclusive canon by adding an ever-increasing number of authors, schools of thought and topics to the exposition, without creating a sufficiently robust interpretative framework for them. The problem, therefore, does not lie in the fact that the textbook includes Foucault, feminism, environmentalism or AI. On the contrary: it is precisely these topics that belong in contemporary political science teaching. The problem lies in the fact that when such broad schools of thought are presented in such a limited scope, the textbook resembles an encyclopaedic list. Students learn that a particular name or topic exists, but they may not acquire the ability to work with it from a political science perspective.

Conclusion

From this perspective, the main conclusion of the article can be formulated as follows: the Czech textbook landscape has shifted from a problem of scarcity to a problem of architecture. Previously, it was possible to say that a compre-

hensive, up-to-date textbook was lacking. Today, it is more accurate to say that mere comprehensiveness is not enough. The key question is no longer merely whether the textbook covers a sufficient number of traditions, authors and contemporary topics, but whether it can use them to create a politically meaningful interpretation of the history of political problems.

An analysis of Czech textbooks and synthetic texts devoted to the history of political thought shows that the Czech context cannot be characterised by a simple lack of literature. There are texts that are chronological-canonical, didactic-political science, ideological-theoretical, philosophical-historical and expansive-cataloguing. Each of these models responds to a different need: orientation within the classical canon, teaching a specific course, the interpretation of ideologies, the scholarly reconstruction of the history of ideas, or an effort to incorporate contemporary themes. The problem lies in the fact that these functions have not yet been combined into a clear model for a political science textbook on the history of political thought.

This criticism does not deny the significance of the new textbook. On the contrary, its contribution lies precisely in the fact that it highlights the problem within the field of textbooks. It shows that the old European canon is inadequate and that contemporary political science requires a broader thematic horizon. At the same time, however, it demonstrates that the solution cannot lie in the mere accumulation of content. A political science textbook on the history of political thought must select, structure and interpret. Its quality is not measured solely by how many authors it includes, but by whether it helps students understand why and how the history of political thought forms part of political science.

The new textbook thus demonstrates that Czech political science no longer needs merely more authors and more topics. Above all, it needs a more carefully considered structure of exposition. Modern political thought cannot be taught merely as an appendix to the classical canon, nor as a telephone directory of notable names. If it is to be truly useful in political science, it must be organised around issues that enable students to understand the relationship between older texts and contemporary political conflicts. Otherwise, the history of political thought becomes a catalogue that is extensive but didactically fragile.

From the perspective of political science pedagogy, it is therefore crucial to distinguish between topicality and interpretation. Topicality means that the textbook covers contemporary issues: the climate crisis, biopolitics, feminism, postcolonial or African political thought, technological power and AI. Interpretation, however, means that these topics are not merely appended to the end of the classical canon, but are linked to long-standing political science issues: sovereignty, power, representation, citizenship, freedom, equality, the body, security, legitimate authority and democracy. Without this problem-based structure, updating occurs without interpretation.

This problem differs from that of older textbooks. Valeš's earlier textbook was limited primarily by the classical European canon and essentially ended with German classical philosophy, Marx, and the political thought of the turn of the 19th century (Valeš 2004). Stulík's lecture notes were even more selective, but openly justified this reduction on didactic grounds (Stulík 2016). The new textbook, by contrast, highlights the opposite risk: not a canon that is too narrow, but one so broad that depth is lost. In other words, the shortcoming of the older texts lay in the absence of many authors and topics; the shortcoming of the new textbook lies in the fact that their mere presence does not in itself constitute a high-quality exposition.

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