

On the Funding Chances of Political Theorizing

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Abstract: This article explores causes and consequences of the declining funding chances of political theorizing with the aim of advancing measures to offset them. Major national and international research programmes growingly present challenges that require problem-solving strategies. Applied research disciplines are better fitted to tackle them than basic research disciplines to which political theorizing belongs. Drawing on the enlightening contribution of theory to political research and politics, it argues that the knowledge it produces can be shared across disciplinary boundaries if its scientific reliability is secured. With that aim, the article submits two practical suggestions: enriching normative accounts of politics with research historically and institutionally informed, and streamlining its inquiring capacity by exploring standard, modular and integrated interdisciplinary approaches.

Keywords: political theorizing; politics; research funding; research methodology; interdisciplinary research

Introduction

As in other scientific fields, political research is rendered in two major categories. First, basic research, whose approaches and outcomes are rooted in theoretical knowledge. Basic research is focused on the discernment of theoretical questions (conceptual, argumentative, normative, prescriptive) and on their practical fulfilling (procedures, institutions, performance). And second, applied research, whose contribution gradually emerges in the path going from theoretical to practical concerns; grounded on theoretical premises and political experience, it aims at solving practical issues.

Basic and applied research are instrumental in producing scientific knowledge, which comes through both their distinct and their shared practices. Overall, they relate to one another in complementary ways, thus creating a flow of epistemic transfers in either direction. This two-way movement even promises to reduce their epistemic

divide (Flink and Kaldewey 2018), but in matters of academic subsistence that expectation loses momentum as the relation between basic and applied research changes significantly. Their respective practitioners need to compete for funding and in so doing, methodological differences matter since, after all, financing research is subject to impact factors.

In this regard, the study of politics raises intriguing questions about its funding eligibility, since this correlates with innovation chances. Besides, measuring its societal, economic, and technological impacts triggers an unofficial ranking among political disciplines, going from political theory or philosophy to policy studies. Ordered by levels of potential impact which are largely based on applicability standards, classifications serve as leagues where research approaches and methods, but also their matching academic curricula, compete for budget assignment.

In America, confirming an ingrained trend, the National Endowment for the Humanities (2024) allocated \$78.25 million for grants in the fiscal year 2024, compared to the National Institutes of Health's federal budget request for 2025 of \$50.1 billion (National Institutes of Health 2024). Comparable proportions are found in other research systems, such as Japan's and South Korea's, but more revealingly, both foster the integration of humanities and social sciences research in interdisciplinary research plans (Japan's Cabinet Office 2024; National Research Foundation of Korea 2024), which fairly coincides with a European pattern.

At the European Union, public budget for research is earmarked through its framework programmes, a series of multi-year plans begun in 1984 that establish the priorities of research innovation and technological development at the European Union level and, by the transposing effect of its norms, at each member state. Chances for the theoretical study of politics have decreased in favour of empirical approaches. In Horizon Europe, spanning from 2021 to 2027, its fundable options have become auxiliary to empirical or applied research (Horizon Europe 2024a). More specifically, the Culture, Creativity and Inclusive Society cluster, gathering research funding for social sciences and humanities, was set to manage for 2023–2024 the amount of €2.28 billion out of a total research budget of €95.5 billion (Horizon Europe 2024b).

Those funding expectations affect, in varying degrees, the viability of research projects and, eventually, the continuity of study programmes, but also somehow the relevance of theoretical research to public debates and politics, as innovation very much relies on endowments and institutional presence. However, for all its interest, which is

weighed in comparative terms, this downsizing of basic political research, of the theoretical study of politics, draws attention to its own professional practices. Although reasons point to the current scientific zeitgeist, where research performance in all disciplines is assessed by business models (Višňovský 2019, pp. 242–43), it is in the practices of basic research that a possible answer to this conundrum lies.

Regardless of long-term causes tied to the emancipation of the social sciences from the humanities which meant, since the last decades of the nineteenth century, a thorough recasting of liberal arts education, this article hypothesizes that at least two work lines can help reverse that declining trend. A first work line has a bearing on a largely dismissed sense of politics in theoretical approaches, namely, the sense illustrated by the practice of political theorizing informed by the joint study of history and political institutions, whereas a second one considers the opportunity, and the costs, of engaging in interdisciplinary research as a way of streamlining innovation and thus strengthening the funding options of theoretical political research.

Accordingly, the article is divided in three sections. The first one, *Researching politics and enlightening political action*, presents the need of political research to explore, understand, and influence the experience of politics. It focuses on how the distance separating political research from politics can be bridged to produce both basic and applied political knowledge. That separation constrains the funding chances of political theorizing since eligibility is measured in compliance with potential impact and this, in turn, in terms of practical applicability.

The second section, *What is political theorizing needed for?*, defends the role of basic political research as irreplaceable to explore politics. The useful character of basic political research comes through the various uses of theory, but along with them it comes through the scientific status of the knowledge it produces which makes it shareable across disciplinary boundaries. The section provides a succinct account of political theorizing debates examined from their methodological perspectives.

The third section, *Doing politics with theory*, argues that the funding chances of political theorizing can improve if its scientific trustworthiness does. To that end it submits two practical suggestions. The first one aims at not confining political theorizing to one of its basic focuses, namely, arguing normative accounts of politics, but expanding it to address current and historical political issues. The second suggestion further develops it by arguing the need of engaging political theorizing in creating interdisciplinary arrangements beyond the traditional formulas of disciplinary

modularity. The article finally ponders the costs and benefits of experimenting with integrated interdisciplinary approaches.

Researching politics and enlightening political action

Of the wide-ranging political literature available, *End State*, James Plunkett's 2021 book, is an eloquent reminder of the distance that separates basic or theoretical political research from politics and the need to work with it in rational ways. Distance is a necessary condition for doing research and, in particular, for political theorizing. At stake is not only the production of knowledge, but how to keep an impartial stance through the research process. Likewise, distance from speculative leanings is clearly a condition for acting politically, but a different matter is its reliance on political theorizing, since detachment from theoretical questions would make politics incomprehensible.

Indeed, the necessary interplay between political theory and practice describes an intriguing picture. A primary aim of the theoretical study of politics is to shed light on political issues. To be politically relevant, it needs to overcome two barriers. The first one is professional, since theoretical advances are discussed at academic settings and are mostly addressed to academic interlocutors, given that scholarly debates confer legitimacy to theoretical achievements. The second barrier is political. Theoretical products need to be translated into applicable resources or, rather, benchmarks for action, either as threads to get out of labyrinthine issues, as critical accounts of political performance, as guides to design and understand the functioning of institutions, or as policy guidelines to tackle political challenges.

Reversely, politics provides the material into which theory inquires – Quentin Skinner's famed reminder for political theorists in the Preface to his *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought* (an updated discussion is Palonen 2005). It is possible, and valuable, to practice theory for theory's sake, which is one of the purposes of political theorizing, but when practical issues are concerned, politics is explored against the backdrop of events and, more precisely, from the deeds of political agents in those events. Assuming this methodological individualist position, Max Weber (1994 [1919], pp. 36–42) argued that politics is a kind of action aimed at influencing the distribution of power and whose multifaceted character is set up by the involvement of different, competing political agents. More precisely, it comes out as a kind of action that both

professional and non-professional agents perform, with comparable interest in either case but with distinct theoretical and practical consequences. Yet, the former case, professional politics, is the one that prompts the most demanding tasks for theoretical research.

Politicians' deeds and ideas determine the course of political events, but they also influence the public conversation and the pulse of scholarly debates. In this respect, it is not just that scholars and politicians speak different languages and go after different professional goals. Their political relationship is altogether necessary but controversial, since the former condition rises questions of mutual intelligibility, whereas the latter speaks of unlikely complementariness.

From one of its angles, the distance between political research and politics shows the difficulty of revising entrenched practices and devising context-bound, well-functioning institutions. A most strenuous undertaking for political imagination is precisely to think of institutions that fit in real political regimes and, confined to their specific circumstances, deliver stability, justice, and effectiveness. But along with wise design, institutions' functioning relies on skilful usage. Statecraft accounts for much of it, whereas its absence usually explains political flaws, to the point that an inadequate use of institutions, something that can be fairly associated with wrong leadership, results in their underperformance, or straightforwardly in their breakdown.

Such concern famously crossed Plato's musings in his *Seventh Letter* (324b–d), describing his disappointment with the government of the Thirty Tyrants (404–403 BC) imposed by Sparta after Athens' defeat in the Peloponnesian War. Upset by the terror unleashed by that oligarchy, Plato reconsidered the advantages of constitutional government (*politeia*) as a fairer political regime for Athens. Later experience till the present has proved that assumption right in the many constitutional governments established since.

From a complementary angle, that same need to make theory relevant to practice also evokes the shared controversiality of politics and political theorizing. Approaching politics is always liable to antithetical views, which may be the only solid certainty about the study of politics. Political knowledge, as any other type of knowledge, is inherently perspectivistic, but the plurality of perspectives that interpret it and aim to enlighten political action have to cope with the condition of politics as a controversial experience. Its contestability is further intensified by what Hannah Arendt (1993, pp.

13–27) called the ‘prejudices against politics’ from which its experience is usually grasped, valued, and devalued.

Plunkett’s book flies over that hindrance, or challenge, without problematizing it further. For pragmatic reasons, it adopts a policy-making approach assuming that political know-how should draw on applicable theoretical work – applicable in the sense of scrutinizing, explanatory, and operational. In turn, for theory to become politically functional, political theorizing should grow out of the observation of politics. What does it mean? Exploring politics entails, accordingly, gaining knowledge about the functions of institutions and policymaking, as Plunkett (2021, pp. 261–87) argues, but also about history and norms and standards that accord meaning to political practices – on balance, that is a kind of interdisciplinary knowledge apt to inform with varied doses of each dimension the theoretical study of politics.

This is a reasonable goal that appeals to the own practice of political theory or philosophy. As any other discipline, its professional exercise is performed through different approaches, which range from normative to historically- and empirically-oriented interpretations of the discipline, each one addressing similar issues but producing dissimilar accounts. To some extent, they complement each other, but with the knowledge that every approach generates their practitioners aim at professional and social recognition.

As suggested above, in matters of academic prestige and research impact it makes sense to consider the dissimilarity that exists between disciplines and how they translate into funding chances. Browsing the political and politically-related journals listed in the Journal Citation Reports and the Scimago Journal and Country Rank sheds some light on it. Of the combined more than three hundred periodicals indexed by the second half of 2024, approximately a quarter prominently deal with theoretical issues. Two caveats arise.

Self-evident as it is, a first one is that quite the same political issues are addressed from partly complementing and partly competing approaches. For example, the challenges to democratic regimes posed by rival, autocratic regimes are researched in comparative politics, international relations, political theory, electoral studies, human rights, and democratization journals. Methods and research outcomes become intelligible and transferable across determined disciplines or subfields. Yet that happens only to some extent, since intelligibility works imperfectly given the degree of specialization reached by academic disciplines, while transferability is made possible

through conceptual adjustments, which means that the transferred knowledge is modified when decoded in the analytic categories of another discipline. The apparent effect is, however, that of a growing methodological and epistemic integration of approaches and, by extension, of disciplines.

A second caveat refers to the traditional divide between basic and applied research which that integration questions, clearly at least in the type of integrated approaches involving several disciplines that has been endorsed for example by recent European Union framework programmes (European Commission 2020; López and Rosales, eds. 2021). And still, the benefits of separation outweigh those of rapprochement due to their effects on academic rank, finance options, and social prestige. Arguably, that gap can play in favour of applied research, because funding eligibility is quantified in terms of potential impact and this, in turn, is elucidated largely in response to major technical, technological, and societal challenges.

To measure research impact, attention is hence addressed to the correspondence set up between those challenges and the problem-solving capacity of research approaches. Acknowledging that empirically-oriented ones are better positioned in this contest, the burden of proof lies with political philosophers and theorists, namely, to demonstrate how can it contribute to the advancement of knowledge. In what follows a new section suggests two work lines to explore, but before presenting them it is worth making a brief mention of the epistemic character of political theorizing, insofar as the way it is performed, and the methodological assumptions guiding it, may determine its funding options.

What is political theorizing needed for?

The practice of any political discipline relies on performative conditions. More precisely, on the skilfulness to communicate expert knowledge and to competently address political issues. That expertise draws on experience and not least on theory resources, but these latter have a different leverage in each case. That is why based on the requirements for funding that major national and international research programmes demand, it can be argued that the heavier their theoretical weight, the lower their funding options. In other words, unlike applied or empirical political disciplines, in theoretical political research, which is shared by disciplines in the humanities and the

social sciences and practised through a variety of approaches, funding options are fewer and prospects look less promising.

Reacting with a lamenting discourse is hopeless. Looking for alternative responses is rather a worthwhile endeavour, even though it takes work and, probably, several tries to bridge the distance that separates political theorizing from empirical political research. To reverse that downside, it is necessary instead showing persuasively in what sense political theorizing makes a difference to explore politics and serves as an indispensable resource in political research. So, accordingly, attention should be directed to how political theorizing is practised and then, to its potential for researching politics and making its advances complement those of applied research. As regards that complementariness, a twofold test needs to be passed.

A first test concerns the role of method in the theoretical study of politics. Looking into methodological assumptions and strategies allows for a scrutiny of the way political theorizing is understood and performed. That self-exploration not only evinces the diversity of qualitative approaches in basic political research (see its historical background in Brinkmann, Jakobsen and Kristiansen 2014), but lays the groundwork for examining the different ways in which the practices of political theorizing justify specific research procedures. Thereafter, compared with empirical approaches, whose scientific status is usually taken for granted, it needs to defend its legitimacy as a type of inquiry that, open to the critical checking of its practice, does contribute to the advancement of knowledge.

The second test has to do with the formal conditions for grant applications. Material conditions refer to resources, be they research teams or networks, team members and their specialties, or technical and administrative support. They are indeed intertwined with formal conditions, but play a subsidiary role in the technique of applications framing. Research challenges are to be addressed in a compelling, effective way and comply with problem-solving procedures. Anything that does not fit in with its game rules is doomed to insignificance, even despite its alleged innovative potential and alleged material resources. In this sense, keeping humanities research detached from the social sciences would leave them in a marginal place to compete for funding, since their corresponding challenges are mostly rendered in the combined terms of humanities and social sciences. That would conceivably produce a disparaging effect akin to the reverse claim's effect that identifies political theorizing, in particular political philosophy, as

non-scientific, thus restricting the meaning of science to only a part of the branches of knowledge.

As is well known, the roots of this polemic around the epistemic credit or worth of political theorizing lie in the rise of analytical philosophy at the early decades of the twentieth century (Pettit 1993; Křepelová 2019, pp. 81–83). More specifically, practitioners of analytical political philosophy, unlike those of traditional political philosophy who performed it embedded in the history of political thought and the history of ideas, engaged then in a search for a distinct epistemic status comparable to that of sciences. They called attention to methodological assumptions in the practice of the discipline as markers of its epistemic status.

Their search for epistemic recognition brought to light that the plurality of approaches in political philosophy was livelier than expected and, for that reason, none of which had the final say on the discipline's academic and scholarly status. Analytical political philosophy became the mainstream for several decades, but political philosophy continued to be practised through alternative approaches (see Christiano and Christman, eds. 2009). From separate debates, all strove for upgrading the discipline yet exercising it differently. At this point, it is convenient to note that the technical meaning of approach pertains to the way research is conducted, but it can also be understood in thematic terms even if in a derivative sense.

Accordingly, approaches reflect, on one side, the varying traditions in political theorizing. Each one bears its own perspective of analysis and thematic focus. They compete with one another to produce theoretical accounts of political questions. Thus, the history of political thinking can be explored through their debates. In that regard, it is possible to trace over the nineteenth century the Romantic reaction to eighteenth-century Enlightenment. Likewise, it is possible to identify, within modern Western political thinking, liberal or Marxist approaches – the former focused on the constitutionalizing of political freedoms, the latter aimed at unveiling the forms of political exploitation that not absolutist, but liberal states and liberal regimes were unable to eradicate.

Approaches also denote the historicity of political theorizing showing the changes over time in the ways the theoretical inquiry of politics has been conducted, as illustrated by the successive responses to the challenges of stable and fair government argued within the republican tradition from antiquity to the present. Yet, historicity affects the very object of theoretical political research. Changes in its practice, as

Quentin Skinner (1969, pp. 34–37) contended, illustrate how basic political questions such as those of power, authority, legitimacy, or violence, to name a few, were not atemporal conundrums as claimed in the tradition of the history of ideas by authors such as Arthur Lovejoy, but changed while being historically thought and politically addressed.

Considered in the technical sense of research methodology, namely, how research is programmed and carried through, approaches reflect, on the other side, where the accent is placed in a research process, that is, how its focus is oriented and its aims selected. The whole range goes from normative to descriptive methods, each one identified by a set of epistemic preferences and matching research procedures, and by a technical language or vocabulary. In short, the changing historical practices of political theorizing are not only informed by intellectual traditions but based on distinct methodological assumptions or principles. Carrying them out delivers different research outcomes.

That plurality has only grown over time. A century on, the analytical tradition continues to focus on the conceptual and argumentative analysis of the language of politics. But along with it, two other major rivals feature in scholarly debates: one is normative-oriented, whereas the other is historically and institutionally contextualized. To put that in perspective a reliable summary of present discussions is provided by Jonathan Floyd. One aspect is especially relevant to consider the funding chances of political theorizing.

In his appraisal of current debates in political philosophy upholds Floyd (2017, pp. 255–76) a diagnosis of the state of contemporary ‘normative political philosophy’. He criticizes that speculative chains of discussions distinguish those debates. By adopting mostly ‘mentalist’ approaches, they deliver poor practical results. Yet, ‘normative political philosophy’ stands out as the mainstream practice of the discipline rivalling other approaches which he includes under the term ‘political political philosophy’.

By focusing on models of institutions, politicians, and practices the former approach fostered a normativist trend that took theoretical analysis largely away from the study of history and the performance of real institutions and politicians. It also aimed at informing or supporting the practice of political philosophy with moral philosophy guidelines. Done for legitimizing purposes, that motive, however, kept it mostly confined to foundational questions – moral foundations of political philosophy somehow matching moral foundations of politics. But morally orienting politics has also a non-foundational meaning, insofar as it appraises politics as a contingent activity

where not only normative aims are to be pondered, but also the consequences of political actions.

The latter approach, by contrast, developed a trend bringing the practice of political philosophy closer to real politics (see e.g. Geuss 2008), that way countervailing the effects of exploring politics from ideal, or imagined, representations of the conditions of the political experience. It shared affinities with approaches from the social sciences such as behaviouralist and methodological individualism. Drawing theoretical analysis on how politicians acted and how they used or misused institutions provided an alternative, sceptical account to researching the experiences of politics.

Lastly, as Tereza Křepelová has insightfully argued, acknowledging the need in the practice of political philosophy to thoughtfully consider the role of methods does not mean searching for a methodological identity between political philosophy and political science (Křepelová 2019, pp. 79–81 and 89–90). Furthermore, the assumption of the unity of scientific method endorsed by logical positivism has been refuted by the rise of a growing plurality of methods competing for research credentials. It is from here that the initial question can be resumed. The epistemic legitimacy of political philosophy can be defended from rival approaches, but what eventually justifies a greater relevance in terms of funding chances is to prove that political theorizing builds an enlightening perspective to explore politics. In other words, that the knowledge it provides turns indispensable to produce innovative results in political research.

That knowledge is itself political (Freedon 2013, pp. 22–66) which means that it aims to be applicable to the understanding, explanation, and practical handling of political affairs. But it also means, reversely, that political theorizing and the knowledge it generates are influenced by the own features of politics. In this respect, Hannah Arendt's remark on the 'prejudices against politics' illustrates the intricacies of theorizing about a kind of action or activity like politics, more prominently professional politics, that is generally perceived as controversial and is largely assessed by its bad reputation (Görtz, Zorell and Fitzgerald 2023). So, being political theorizing political, namely, a dimension of politics, its own practice is imbued with that value judgement from the start. Both charges, the controversiality and the bad name of politics, tell something about the interpretive difficulties and the epistemic effects of theoretical political research.

Doing politics with theory

In line with those remarks, the question arises as to whether it is possible to improve the epistemic trustworthiness of the theoretical study of politics. This article argues that. However, achieving it can only arrive through revising its own practices with the aim of highlighting how their analytic function turns irreplaceable for exploring politics. This means, first, complementing its normative role with other uses of political theory and, secondly, inquiring into its interdisciplinary versatility to broaden it.

To begin with, the first aim entails not circumscribing political theorizing to solely envisaging normative accounts. These, admittedly, present in argumentative terms the reasonableness of institutional designs and of theoretical and practical responses to political questions, as illustrated by political theories and by political philosophical argumentations. Normative accounts, arguing the reasonable preferability of political ideas and actions, are indeed most distinct products of theoretical research, but they do not exhaust its analytic capacity.

Hence, improving the scientific trustworthiness of the theoretical study of politics entails further developing other dimensions of theoretical research, if certain requirements are met. Critical analysis, assessment, conceptualization, interpretation, advice, prescription, ruling, forecast – all are inherent operations to the uses of theory, and part of them also of empirical approaches, yet they need to be historically and institutionally informed and situated. Furthermore, relying on those conditions, they need to prove that their role becomes instrumental in the multidisciplinary integration of theoretical political research, which is the second aim of the scientific trustworthiness endeavour.

As noted above, political theorizing is practised through a variety of approaches. Yet, attention to methodological aspects has become prominent in especially the cases of analytical political philosophy (List and Valentini 2016) and in the interplay of conceptual history and other methods of historical research with political philosophy (see, e.g., Duso 2008). Along with reasons of epistemic trustworthiness and of interdisciplinarity, there is an underlying concern regarding the public significance of political theorizing (Floyd 2022).

Approaches attest to differences in methods and in research goals. Revealingly, they are discussed and tested in usually unconnected debates that at most allow for sporadic mutual transfers, such as for example those around the study of populism as an anti-

representative style of politics channelled between democratic theory debates and political representation debates. In this regard, Nadia Urbinati's 2019 book, *Me the People: How Populism Transforms Democracy*, is an exception that proves the rule. But if the practice of political theorizing, from any of its approaches, follows recognizable and checkable research protocols, to wit, if its methodological assumptions are spelt out, argumentation rules are respected, and results draw consistently on those research premises, the knowledge it generates can be fairly submitted as scientific. This means, indeed, that it is open to further revisions, since the outcomes of any political research always contain grounds for new explorations.

This implies, among other effects, that it can be transferable to other disciplines. How would that be done? Advancements in knowledge come from all disciplines and it is their epistemic value, their scientific character, what makes those advancements shareable across disciplinary boundaries. The scientific character of research speaks in that vein clearly of its communicability and its aptness to be used in other scientific domains. This quality of scientific knowledge overcomes to a significant extent traditional methodological and epistemic barriers dividing social sciences from humanities as it makes it a shareable resource. To clear up doubts, those barriers are no longer taken into account in national and international research programmes. Though acknowledging their diversity of traditions, disciplines, and approaches, they arrange research in humanities and social sciences jointly when formulating major challenges crossing several branches of knowledge.

Moreover, going down to practical consequences, the costs of not being considered scientific, as underlined for example by Pinker (2013), outweigh any conceivable benefits for claiming a singular epistemic status that even major research plans do not grant. In other words, presenting humanistic knowledge, particularly that of political philosophy, as non-scientific would isolate it and risk downgrading its epistemic rank (see McDermott 2008). But, regardless of methodological and epistemic considerations, the effects of its appraisal as non-scientific go beyond the prospects for research funding. They ultimately touch on academic prestige and the relevance of theory itself to political debates and politics.

In response to such conundrum, the last part of this paper submits two practical suggestions that unfold the above reasoning. Arguably, were it not for research funding adversities and for academic subsistence in times of deep revamping of university structures and curricula (Miller, Cunningham and Lehmann 2021), both would have

only arisen as occasional proposals in scholarly debates. More precisely, in debates resuming a long discussion, traceable from the last few decades, about the research applicability and practical relevance of political theorizing.

The first suggestion is to strengthen the problem-solving capacity of political theorizing. Which way? By addressing both current and historical political issues, which usually play a lesser role in normative political accounts and debates. As Michael Freeden argues:

The preponderant part of contemporary political theory, usually associated with political philosophy, is devised to improve normative argument and enrich its foci, not to change the direction of the ways we research, interpret and elucidate political thought, its features, grammars, and rationales (Freeden 2013, p. 12).

Current political issues bring political theorizing closer to empirical political approaches, to other social sciences and, lastly, to journalism, whereas historical political issues bring political theorizing closer to the exploratory perspective adopted in political history and the history of political thought.

That suggestion does not mean assuming a different role from which political philosophers or theorists would be seen as amateur practitioners of other disciplines, but as political philosophers or theorists engaged in the production of interdisciplinary knowledge. Both ways entail in fact rooting political theorizing in an instrumental knowledge of politics, history, and political institutions to empirically substantiate it. This is somehow equivalent to the instrumental knowledge of political theory or philosophy accredited by practitioners of empirical political disciplines and of other social sciences. Otherwise, a lack of the empirical support provided by that knowledge would weaken the role of theory, reducing it to speculative thinking and, therefore, making it fade from the spotlight of research funding.

The second practical suggestion is to explore interdisciplinary formulas to streamlining the problem-solving capacity of political theorizing. As mentioned above, the challenges raised by major national and international research plans recommend the adoption of interdisciplinary approaches. Traditional modular formulas between disciplinary methods and techniques have long been accepted, but over the past decades proposals to build integrated approaches have become prominent. That is a clear invitation to experiment with new approaches across disciplinary boundaries assuming

that modular schemes fall short of successfully addressing those challenges. Indeed, for example, international migrations and trafficking in human beings, climate emergencies, global trade, the growth of authoritarian regimes, or the impact of artificial intelligence on human relationships point squarely in the direction of novel types of interdisciplinary strategies.

Two interrelated notes are here in order, one regarding the political capacity of theory, and another regarding its workable interdisciplinary arrangements. The functions of political theorizing are not limited to producing normative accounts. Addressing political challenges requires it to come closer to the approaches of other political disciplines and, as well, of other disciplines politically relevant. Underlying that aim is the aspiration of making theoretical knowledge an invaluable enlightening resource to complement empirical knowledge and, ultimately, to become politically determinant.

Discerning the political potential of political philosophy or theory has a lengthy history. Its modern landmark can be searched in post-Hegelianism debates. From Marxist social and political thought to pragmatism and neo-pragmatism there was a reaction to turn the principles of that intellectual tradition into pivotal political factors. Through the nineteenth century that move inspired the production and political engagement, at the crossroads of socialist and liberal positions, of the so-called English idealists. Later, it was decisively reformulated by Max Horkheimer in his 1937 essay on traditional and critical theory. Unlike traditional theory, focused on the exploration of social reality, critical theory should aim at its transformation (Horkheimer 2009 [1937]).

Over the years, at scholarly debates this transformative or emancipatory potential of political theorizing became a token of its political capacity. Still, that remains an asset, but currently its crucial test may lie in the expectations for new interdisciplinary approaches to tackle novel challenges described by major national and international research plans. Indeed, the involvement of political theorizing in integrated approaches to meet scientific, technical, technological, economic, and societal challenges is an open path to explore.

Such approaches should go beyond tactical couplings among methods and techniques which are typical of cross disciplinary arrangements in, for example, biomedical engineering, data mining and opinion polling, or the political uses of generative artificial intelligence. Necessary as they are, what is expected is not a mere functional distribution of tasks according to expertise in research projects, but an

interplay between practitioners of different disciplines aimed at transcending that modular stage.

Research cooperation at this level requires engaging in methodological debates. So, not just an exchange of views from the different disciplinary perspectives involved in each research partnership, even though that very endeavour is a basic condition for interdisciplinarity. An exchange of views can also pave the way for other kinds of collaborative research which should draw on the communication of expert knowledge. However, only when the methods to achieve that knowledge are clearly explained and fairly understood by the other experts, even if by analogical adaptations, it is then possible to properly open a debate.

Inquiring what sort of interdisciplinary arrangements would ease the problem-solving skilfulness of political theorizing takes directly to this kind of methodological discussions. From them, the complementary skilfulness of other disciplines involved, namely, their analytic, interdisciplinary introspection, would also improve. Political theorizing can contribute to finetune their conceptual accuracy and their argumentative layout. Most decisively, it can help reduce the degree of moral naivety of interpretations not well versed in theoretical analysis and inform about the moral problematicity of political actions – an aspect, this latter one, that goes usually unnoticed in political science's accounts of the political experience.

For sure, the moral problematicity of political actions can never disappear, since their controversial character is inherent to politics as a kind of experience, to use Weber's formulation, created by agents striving for political influence or power. It makes sense to highlight at this point, following Palonen's comments (2017, pp. 1–13), Weber's claim (1994 [1919], p. 36) that power is a necessary means for politics, not its end. More than in any other political activity, it is in professional politics where striving for power shows its moral ambivalence. Whoever crosses the line of professional politics unavoidably faces its ethical paradoxes and experiences what it takes to be politically responsible (Weber 1994 [1919], p. 85).

And furthermore, as Max Weber argued, the most that can be expected is that sharing power and influencing its distribution among stakeholders produce some reasonable effects, in terms of non-zero-sum distributions of costs and benefits. Typically, political courses of action are contested beforehand, but also after they have been performed, because of their open-ended controversiality, which is the basic condition for the exercise of political theorizing.

Concluding remarks

This article has tried to answer two questions. The first is why the funding chances of political theorizing are dwindling. To a significant extent that is because it usually proceeds according to research protocols others than those required by major national and international research programmes to tackle the challenges they raise. Political research is embodied in practices of basic and applied research. The former, of which political theorizing is a prime example, delves into theoretical questions and their practical rendering, whereas the latter usually addresses practical issues. Its readiness to focus them in problem-solving terms places applied political research in a pre-eminent position when it comes to research challenges and impact.

The second question is whether and how those chances can be improved. The article has argued that it does, vindicating theory's enlightening role in political research and politics. In the context of research funding, the knowledge produced by political theorizing should pass the test of scientific communicability which opens the path for knowledge transfers, namely, for political theory or philosophy contributions to be used and adapted to the practices of other disciplines.

To help improve those chances it has suggested two practical moves. On the one hand, it has defended the epistemic advantages of enriching normative accounts of politics, which represent political theory's mainstream practice, with the knowledge produced by the study of political history and institutions, that way bringing political theorizing closer to real politics.

On the other hand, it has argued the opportunity of engaging political theorizing in collaborative research across disciplinary boundaries through a two-track endeavour: in traditional, modular interdisciplinary formulas, which is a path already explored, [and in integrative methods, where it may turn necessary for political theorists or philosophers to approach problem-solving research patterns](#). The latter notably appear on the specifications of recent research programmes. The costs involved can be partly anticipated but also partly unexpected, since any integrated arrangement relies on a kind of teamwork that greatly differs from modular cooperation. Yet, the benefits of entering this uncharted territory are worth it.

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