Abstract

The rapid changes of parameters we have experienced in recent years are confronting social science researchers with new scenarios and perspectives. These situations are so new that the conceptual task of enquiring into how to approach these new contexts is becoming an imperative for the innovative dynamics of the discipline in itself. There is an increasingly widely-held conviction that the theoretical reflections and political decisions that are made here and now are of vital importance, as what is being designed is the political society of the future. Within this framework, political theory (PT) as a critical activity has fertile soil that is unprecedented in recent history. We have to pose two questions that are linked with one another: What is its function in relation to this reality of social and political instability? What are the instruments (concepts, approaches, etc.) it can provide us with for the analysis of these structural changes? I will articulate my reasoning into six chapters. In the first, I present the first elements for initiating a reflection on PT as it is today. In the second, I consider which is the viewpoint from which the political theoretician interprets changing reality, centring particularly on its unity of analysis and basic aims. Chapter three is historical. I review the main stages of PT, focussing on the last in accordance with my central thread: the analysis of the contexts of social and political changes. I consider then, in the fourth chapter, which are the main research programs that contribute at present to the study of these structural changes. In order to complete this argument, in chapter five I go deeper into the main current approaches that exist for analysing these changes, which determine different forms of understanding the activity of PT itself. Finally, in the sixth and last chapter, I return to the current meaning of PT, indicating its main challenges and expectations, as manager of political innovation. I end with some final reflections to leave this research program open. In a appendix, I present some arguments on PT in Spain, as a basis for future research.

Keywords

Political Theory, Historical Evolution, Research Programmes, Processes of Change, Political Innovation