Call for Papers:

Political Theory of the Digital Constellation

A whole range of interpretative approaches from sociology, philosophy, communication and media science strive to describe the characteristics of a society affected by digital technology. This cannot be claimed to the same extent for political theory. Thus, the special issue aims to bring together interpretative and normative approaches for the political-theoretical interpretation of the connections between digitalization and politics.

Political-theoretical diagnoses of digitalization often refer to a structural change of the public sphere, which is reflected, for example, in a fragmentation or polarization through algorithmic selection. The rise of a digital constellation, however, transcends changes of public communication infrastructures. Digitalization finds expression in the challenge of state sovereignty and modes of 'soft' control, the valorization of transparency norms, a data-based biopolitics ranging from wearables to health insurance, the digital measurement of the social to produce political categories, or the shaping of the demos in the context of political representation. The relative speechlessness of political theory is irritating against the background of the traditionally intensive theoretical examination of technically induced transformations, for example in Adam Smith, Karl Marx or Walter Benjamin. In the discourses of the digital constellation, media and technology are all too quickly ascribed a hierarchizing, delegitimizing character and a mythologizing simplicity and immediacy as an ideal which do little justice to reality, neither in the present nor in the past. This observation becomes the starting point in the context of this special issue to systematically develop political theory for the digital constellation in three directions: in diachronic reconstruction, synchronic analysis and normative perspective.

Firstly, we ask about the history of ideas, knowledge, and technology of digitalization in the field of the political, and thus about the implicit presuppositions of the history of political theory. Contested assumptions about the form of the press and the infrastructure of a public sphere as automatic stabilizers of democratic politics are only the most obvious aspect. The guiding question here is: How and with what implications were digitalization-related developments theoretically systematized or how were they integrated into existing theoretical frameworks?

Secondly, we intend to look at digitalization as an object and structural element of current politics. To what extent does digitalization challenge classical basic assumptions – e.g. regarding the media, social or technical conditions – of political theory and what are the implications for the respective theories? Thus, the epistemological intervention taking place on a theoretical level as a result of digitization will be systematically reflected upon. To us, it seems to be of central importance to link this investigation with interdisciplinary debates and, if necessary, to import

theoretical approaches from other disciplines and contexts – such as Science & Technology Studies, Communication Sciences or Philosophy of Technology.

Thirdly, we want to ask the question what consequences these reflections have from a normative perspective. How can political theory, considering the recursive character of digitalization, offer meaningful interpretations into phenomena of this structural change? Here it is important to conceptualize technology and society not as separate dimensions, but as interwoven aspects. Normative problems of politics, for example in the area of the legitimation of power, the organization of opinion and will formation and the constitution of political orders, must therefore be considered against the background of social interdependence with technology.

The answers to these questions are intended to contribute to a well-founded examination of political theory with the complex of topics of digital structural change. By critically examining the rehearsed narratives of digitization, reflecting on existing normative positions, and integrating the findings of other disciplines into political science research, this special issue will promote the discussion of political spaces for thought and action in the digital society. Political theory of the digital constellation thus means working out structured perspectives on the digital society and feeding them back to political science as well as political practice.

For the special issue 'Political Theory of the Digital Constellation', we are asking for contribution proposals in the form of *extended abstracts* of max. 800 words by 30 September 2020. Following a first selection within four weeks, the complete contributions are to be submitted by 30 January 2021. The contributions will then be subject to a double-blind peer review and in case of a successful review will be published online first in 2021. Please send your contribution proposals to zpol.digitheo@wzb.eu

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