

CHARLES UNIVERSITY IN PRAGUE
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DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE

AN ABBREVIATED THESIS TO

POLITICAL NEPOTISM
(POLITICKÝ NEPOTIZMUS)

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The submitted dissertation offers a contemporary definition of nepotism as often witnessed in offices of power in the liberal democratic regime. Even though the term has emerged as a profoundly political and pejorative label for appointments of Papal nephews in Renaissance Vatican, it was neglected in the main stream political science and philosophy of the 20th century. Despite this, nepotism seems part of the lore of the political sphere. It is associated with political elites, and it is reported in the press in the form of circumstantial evidence. Yet, nepotism has not been neglected by other branches of science. The anthropological account of it is large and with sweeping consequences for political philosophy, one of which is its apparent exogenous origin. Preference of kin, affinity to persons who are perceived as familiar, and preferential treatment of relatives, the anthropologist affirms, are common in all human societies. If nepotism is a political expression of this deeply engrained drive, it can hardly be wished away as a legacy moral motivation which has no place in the modern society. Nepotism rather requires a broad account and deep analysis of its political consequences, which is what this dissertation offers.

A philosophical examination of nepotism is as thrilling once nepotism is relegated from the realm of snubs among the liberals, and when it is given a moral classification. The anthropologist argues that nepotism is a strategy which expresses a tendency to altruism observed among humans. True, this altruism is instrumental and selective, yet it requires an explanation especially in a species which features free will. Altruism has been a hurdle which the evolutionary theory had struggled to explain until it became obvious that genes perpetuate also in parallel, that is nepotism adds to evolutionary fitness because fitness is increased when one's genetic *relatives* procreate. The nephew needs not be Pope's son. And once anthropologists realised that humans lack a sensory device to assess the genetical distance to other people, they started to document the various *cues* which increase feelings of affinity and motivate altruistic acts in humans. Humans are conditioned to prefer their own, genetically, culturally and morally. The anthropologist demonstrates that, further, this omnipresent tendency to altruistic acts (be they selective) is an efficient method to overcome another problem which has plagued the science of human society, the free-driving. The altruistic vibe present in a preference of kin helps explain why the human society does not break down due to expediency of some individuals. In the dissertation, free-driving is indeed understood as a moral doctrine of expediency in line with an argument proposed already by John Stuart Mill (1879, loc. 376-79). And anthropologists claim that there is a societal moral undercurrent which drives humans to altruism, hence nepotism, away from free-driving.

Now this constitutes a fertile ground, philosophically. On one hand, there is a tendency to prefer one's kin. On the other, there is a theory of justice (Rawls 1999) which rationally explains the working of a political system which produces a large amount of primary social goods (or Liberty).

And this theory argues that any preference of kin in appointments to the offices of power in a liberal democracy lessens the liberty of all. In this theory, nepotism conflicts with the second principle of justice, which is a principle claiming that in a fair society, any difference in primary social goods (such as access to political offices) can be justified only when it contributes to the wellbeing of the worst off. This constitutes a political imperative. If taken for its word, the theory cannot robustly explain prevalence of political nepotism in a society producing, at the same time, large amounts of liberty. Yet, the aim of this dissertation is not to provide any comfortable complicity with nepotism, but the aim is to explain this discrepancy between conflicting moral values, rationally.

In order to unravel this, there are several steps taken in this dissertation. First, there is a review of the anthropological account of nepotism. In it, it becomes obvious that nepotism is an expression of a wide-spread strategy to promote a specific merit attached to cooperation and that this moral value motivates cooperation. Then, nepotism in historic and contemporary economic settings is shown to be a viable strategy to retain and increase personal wealth; this adds to its prevalence. Economists have demonstrated beyond any reasonable doubt that a preference of kin in hiring and in business will result in an accelerated accumulation of wealth across generations for some. This is why the theory of justice is ultimately uncomfortable with any preference of kin, for its substantial effect in skewing the wealth distribution. In the eye of the theory, nepotism seems to be the opposite of equality for this one effect on equality.

Then, this dissertation offers a reading of John Rawls's theory of justice as fairness, one which carefully exposes the workings of the theory. The theory is not taken for what some label as 'normative,' that is a theory which tells how the world is supposed to be. The first sentence of the theory (Rawls 1999, 3) sets the tone of this dissertation when Rawls states that 'Justice is the first virtue of social institutions, as truth is of systems of thought.' And this dissertation cannot read this as if Rawls intended to write that justice *ought* to be the first virtue or that truth *ought* to be the measure of one's thoughts. Next, this dissertation attempts to answer Rawls's call who challenges the reader to offer a theory which is truer than his theory of justice. And this dissertation does so within political philosophy. Specifically, this dissertation is focused on the way in which Rawls's core thought experiment is constructed, and on his *thin* theory of the good which contains the moral values which are argued to be shared among all members of a well-ordered society (based on principles of justice).

This dissertation delves into nine arguments which all pertain directly to the conflict of two moral doctrines exposed earlier: the preference of kin and equal access to offices of power. The labels for these areas are altruistic traits, robust moral personality, overlapping agreement, arbitrariness of

circumstances, entitlements, shared morals, congruence of personal goods with principles of justice, and the social justice. In all these features of Rawls's theory, there have been a compound criticism piling since the first edition in 1971. This dissertation offers to align the criticisms under one charge, that the method of explaining impartiality in Rawls's original thought experiment is imperfect. The challenge is mounted against the 'veil of ignorance' which is shown to harbour a *bias against virtues*, in the dissertation. This is claimed to be unlike what is expected to be observed in the reality. In brief, a *bias against virtue* is a tendency to refuse to consider some individual non-natural virtues (aims) in the 'original position' of Rawls's even though these virtues do not lessen fairness. This dissertation considers several methods to improve the condition of impartiality in the original deliberation over constitutive principles of social cooperation until it settles with an alternative mode, the shorthand description of which is an *arbitration of equals*. This principle of equitable settlement is offered to supplant Rawls's veil and to improve the condition of impartiality in order to produce principles of justice which can better accommodate some conflicts of moral doctrines.

Then, the argument proceeds to establish a model theoretical case in which two methods of explaining impartiality produce two different expectations. This design then allows to make an observation of reality and to compare it with the two expectations, that is by utilising a common scientific method. The theoretical case is one of a power-wielding politician who is a mother. As she is intended to be a *good politician* in a liberal democracy (say a well-ordered society explained by the theory of justice as fairness), she will not prefer her daughter when considering her for appointment to a public office since she is morally bound by the difference principle to provide an equal access to those who are less advantaged, that is to those who were not born to power-wielding politicians. Yet, if she wants to be a *good mother*, she will prefer her kin when her interest is so narrowly construed. One may claim that Rawls's original position is not designed to answer such personal calls, yet this assumption would be far from Rawls's purpose. Indeed, Rawls has *intended* the original position to serve as a method to reconcile any individual's moral principles (rational aims) with principles of fair cooperation in a process of reaching a deliberative equilibrium of values. The veil of ignorance (as a source of impartiality) is then argued to cause the model mother-politician to choose not to promote her daughter's appointment. The arbitration of equals however offers a different outcome.

In an arbitration of equals, awards are agreed to by parties in dispute, and this agreement contributes to fairness. In case of a dispute over access to offices of power, this access needs not to be equal as long as there is an equitable trade-off of awards, that is the party which lacks access to offices of power is compensated by primary social goods, and this party agrees to it. Both parties are empowered because the agreement is subject to a contemplated satisfaction of their aims. This method of ensuring impartiality in explaining principles of fair cooperation then does not

discriminate against virtues. If any virtue is to be found in political nepotism, it will be the base of an equitable agreement. This theoretical assumption is found already evident in various circumstances. For example, political dynasties, which are a specific case of occupational following among politicians, are argued to improve accountability of American politicians toward voters. The politician is argued and observed not to want to harm the chances of his progeny to a political career by engaging in nefarious activities. An arbitration of equals, as a method to explain impartiality, then does not need to presuppose, unlike what Rawls's veil of ignorance leads one to believe, that a mother-politician will always choose to be a politician over her parental tendencies, or when she will not then the system does not produce primary social goods.

Next, this dissertation tests whether there is political nepotism present in the Czech Republic. In this test, there are measures of genetic homogeneity taken of some 2,500 politicians elected to offices during a 19-year span. If politicians are drawn from the population irrespective of their DNA then their genes will show the diversity expected from randomness. This dissertation uses statistical methods to estimate the genetic variability of politicians by examining surname frequencies. These methods are Fisher's α (a measure of genetic diversity of a sample when family names are taken as biological taxa), Yule's K (the characteristic vocabulary richness of a sample when family names are taken as words in a linguistic corpus), and surname paucity (estimating probability of identical surnames occurring in sample). All these methods have been attested to estimate genetic diversity among many populations due to the transmission of Y chromosomes and surnames from father to son. When certain assumptions are met, the methods can compare genetic variability *between* groups of people—and this is what is done in the dissertation. The politicians' genetic diversity is compared to the genetic diversity of a group of the same size drawn from the Czech population randomly. And, these indicators tell that the Czech politicians are interrelated more often than is possible by chance. This is argued to be a result of occupational following among politicians, and it is in line with the theoretical expectation of occupational following because it has been observed elsewhere and by other methods, for example among the US congressmen and by examination of their pedigrees.

In the final part, the model theoretical case is translated to observations made in the Czech Republic. If there are more relatives present in offices of power than is possible by chance, these beneficiaries and patrons of altruism shown towards kin might have faced, at one point or another, the model moral conflict expounded by Rawls's veil of ignorance. Obviously if they did, they must have decided rather to become 'good mothers' or 'good fathers' than 'good politicians' and as a consequence the political system is expected not produce large amounts of primary social goods, in Rawls's rendition of the theory of justice. Or, if the patrons and beneficiaries facilitated their moral

conflicts by a method encapsulated in an arbitration of equals, they might have created arrangements which are found favourable in terms of primary social goods by those who seem to be losing access to offices of power. Irrespective of the particular personal motivations of Czech politicians, an arbitration of equals chances to describe a mode of solving such conflicts of moral doctrines, and especially those which are between individual values and systemic principles. The main benefit of this approach is that individual reasons for seemingly breaching Rawls's principles of justice are required to assess whether the system remains to be fair, or not.

Yet, this dissertation does not try to determine any individual reasons beyond those already revealed in the scientific literature. This dissertation does not determine what kind of a trade-off of equitable awards exists in the Czech Republic to legitimise the high rates of occupational following in politics. It rather shows, in a very specific and under-researched area, that a philosophically interesting class of moral conflicts exists in the political sphere. This class concerns values which can, at the same time and in the best Humean tradition, have positive and negative moral charges, such as acts of discrimination in favour of someone (merit) and against someone else (demerit). At most, this dissertation attempts to show that the presented methods and ideas may lead one to better understand all conflicts of the same sort. These are for example conflicts between the freedom of speech (civic or systemic value) and religious convictions (personal values) which have shown profound and violent expressions in the public sphere, recently.

In addition and in the course of writing this dissertation, various datasets and algorithms have been created which can be used by others for their research and analyses. These entail 2,156 lines of code in the R statistical environment (R Core Team 2013), first name and surname frequencies of all attorneys practicing law in the Czech Republic (Czech Bar Association 2014), of all judges (Czech Ministry of Justice 2014), and of all notaries (Notarial Chamber of the Czech Republic 2014), surnames of all civil servants at the Czech Foreign Office (Czech Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2014), and processed surname and first name frequencies of the whole Czech population (Czech Ministry of Interior 2013; 2014). And above all, this dissertation compiles election results spanning 19 years including first names and surnames of elected politicians (Czech Statistical Office 1994; 1996a; 1996b; 1998a; 1998b; 1999; 2000a; 2000b; 2000c; 2002a; 2002b; 2002c; 2003a; 2003b; 2004a; 2004b; 2004c; 2004d; 2006a; 2006b; 2006c; 2007a; 2007b; 2008a; 2008b; 2009; 2010a; 2010b; 2010c; 2011; 2012a; 2012b).

References

Please consult the full dissertation for the references mentioned in this abbreviated thesis.