

The Market Metaphor

As an Issue of Political Language and Practice

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Abstract

This paper focuses on the problem of analogies and metaphors in politics, concretely the metaphor of the market and the various analogies it encompasses applied to the political sphere, as a phenomenon of political language and practice. The inspiration behind this article is a sociological critique of the economic theory of politics by Lars Udehn. After forming a basic theoretical framework for the terms analogy and metaphor, the author discusses the problem of methodological inconsistency in the social sciences. The discussion of metaphor is presented in three parts: the inherence of homo economicus in politics, politics as exchange and politics as competition. The crucial thesis of this paper is that there are limitations on the extent to which political processes and phenomena may be understood in market terms, and individual analogies that have emerged from this metaphor are by definition only partially applicable. The conclusion is that the market metaphor presents specific difficulties and is an oversimplification which will lead sooner or later to significant misunderstandings and misinterpretations of politics.

Keywords: market metaphor; homo economicus; generative metaphors; exchange and competition in politics; political marketing; voter preferences; persuasion

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1. Introduction

With its focus on the logic of language and linguistic analysis, twentieth-century analytical philosophy brought a clean break with prior notions of humankind and the world. Language was viewed as the mediator between the world and our knowledge of it. And this language-based analysis has been used as well to illuminate political discourse, helping social scientists to see directly ‘under the surface’ of politics. Our modes of thought and the ways we use language construct the world of politics: the metaphors employed in political discourse are

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constitutive of the way in which we perceive political reality, as well as how particular individuals and entities behave in the political process.

As the economic theory of politics grew in popularity during the latter half of the twentieth century, the power offered by the perspective it provided, derived from extending economic methods, tools, and thinking to political analysis, seduced many political scientists. The language of economics became part of political science, and economism – the reduction of all social phenomena to economics – assumed its place as a tool in political science research. Economism reduces all products of human activities, including cultural artifacts, to goods. In its contemporary use, it refers to the economic analysis of seemingly non-economic aspects of life. Politics is understood as an economic activity in which voters and politicians act as buyers and sellers.

Under the methodological approach used here, the overextension of economism is taken as one type of reductionism that occurs within the social sciences. Our focus will be on the phenomenon of economic imperialism, as discussed in George J. Stigler's *Economics: the Imperial Science?* (1984) and Uskali Mäki's *Economic Imperialism: Concept and Constraints* (2009). A prerequisite for effectively critiquing the various forms of socio-philosophical reductionism in the social sciences, including economism, is correctly understanding the place and function of cycles involving individual subsystems within social reproduction as a whole (Černík, Vicenik 2011: 82).

The most exhaustive and consistent sociological critique of the economic theory of politics may likely be found in a book by Lars Udehn, currently head of the Department of Political Science at Stockholm University. This work, *The Limits of Public Choice* (1996), has been the inspiration and chief basis for this paper.

Economic reductionism gives rise to multiple metaphors that we use to explain phenomena present in politics. Neoclassical economists and authors depoliticize politics, and this same depoliticization is reflected in the vocabulary used by politicians from neoconservative and neoliberal parties, in the growing influence of marketing on political developments, and in the PR sector. Public space has been colonized by reductionist economizing thinking. Metaphors that should serve to explain or describe complex phenomena and relationships take on normative force and dictate how politics is to function.

When one speaks of economic imperialism, one also often speaks of the imperialism of management theories that 'crowd out more appropriate ways of thinking about politics' (Henneberg 2004: 234). There is no one individual at fault, but rather a whole set of factors, and the aim in this article is not to critique political marketing, nor is it obvious how political marketing and managerial concepts shift the system toward plebiscitary democracy (Henneberg 2004: 238).

We would nevertheless like to mention the opposing opinion, represented by contemporary political marketing theorists. They are under attack because political marketing often evokes negative feelings and is considered harmful for politics and democracy. Political scientists focus mainly on the ethical aspects of political marketing management practice (Henneberg et al. 2009: 166). Nicholas J. O'Shaughnessy admits that the views of democracy we hold are key (O'Shaughnessy 1990: 6). Deontological theories of democracy, in particular, view political marketing as an alien element in the political realm (Henneberg 2004: 237). O'Shaughnessy is aware of the ethical problems associated with political marketing but

attributes the broad critique leveled against it to marketing theorists' neglect of ethical research (O'Shaughnessy 2002).

As referenced above, Stephan Henneberg has collected and catalogued some of these criticisms laid by political scientists. He reveals that the problem of 'selling politics' is tied to a fundamental theoretical problem – 'whether or not marketing concepts as such can and should be used to describe political behavior' (Henneberg 2004: 228). This criticism of political marketing is directed both at the level of political marketing theory and at the practical level of political marketing management. Henneberg accepts the critique at some points, and sees it as justified.

The structure of this study has been determined by our methodology in selecting analogies contained within the market metaphor to examine. The study is divided into three core sections. Each is named after one of these analogies. They were chosen because they normally feature in establishing the definitional framework of the economic market within economic theory. The first makes reference to *homo economicus* – conceived to be a rationally acting person; the second portrays *politics as exchange*; and the third, *politics as competition*, or as a competitive match. Before turning to these individual analogies in detail, we briefly outline contemporary metaphor theory and then identify the difference between *analogy*, as it is used here, and *metaphor*, placing the issue at hand within the framework of Donald Schön's conceptualization of generative metaphor.

To explore these analogies, we make use of the comparative method. Initially, 'analogy' is defined, along with its functioning in economic theory and economics generally. Then analogies used in political theory and politics are identified. And finally, we examine whether the economic and political spheres both make use of these same analogies: we determine whether *homo economicus* as a rational individual exists in both economics and politics, whether *exchange* is envisioned in the same terms in both the political and economic markets, and whether *competition* in economics is equivalent to the notion of politics as a competitive match.

Are governments and marketplaces really similar? What about citizens and customers? Are they equivalent in any significant ways? Nowadays, the market metaphor is taken for granted, but the public and private sectors are in fact, as Patterson (1998: 221–222) puts it, 'totally alike in all unimportant aspects'. Our central thesis is that thinking of political processes and phenomena in terms of the economic market has its limits, and that the individual analogies that have emerged as part of this metaphor are by definition only partially appropriate to their target. The market metaphor gives rise to specific difficulties and simplifications which, sooner or later, result in significant misunderstandings and misapprehensions about politics. The objective is to show that although metaphors may be used to explicate particular phenomena, their substance is not identical across both economics and political theory and practice. The economic marketplace does not behave like the political 'market. If we choose the wrong methodological assumptions, we may easily end up with a set of extraneous normative expectations about the political sphere. This paper, then, may be understood as a 'defence of politics' as an autonomous sphere with its own rules of the game.

2. Defining Approach

A metaphor is a figure of speech that is often employed in political theory and political practice. It is not peculiar to politics as a social science, though: metaphors may guide our understanding of complex, difficult relationships in any domain. But they may also mislead. Because of this, examining their impact takes on urgency, and this is what we do in the text that follows. The Czech political scientist Petr Drulák speaks of metaphor in politics in terms of discursive structures, i.e., customary rules that impact the discourse itself (Drulák 2009: 59). Lakoff and Johnson's *Metaphors We Live By* suggest that metaphor is more than simply a speech act or poetic ornament. Rather than being a purely linguistic phenomenon, it pertains directly to our thoughts and actions: how we think and behave is largely influenced by metaphor (Lakoff and Johnson 1980: 3–4). An example they cite, 'ARGUMENT IS WAR' is a perfect example, and confirms that the way we perceive a particular activity impacts how we perform it.

The use of metaphor is thus in no way neutral. Metaphor has a determining influence over our understanding of particular situations. It frames the subject and decides how we think about a topic area. Individual metaphors organize our thoughts and actions and become a substitute for thought and analysis, but often gain uncritical acceptance and harbour certain perils (Patterson 1998: 221). They function to suppress certain aspects of a situation and emphasize others, thus shaping meaning in a way that justifies particular actions or sanctions particular acts, or simply aids in choosing goals (Lakoff and Johnson 1980: 142).

Terrell Carver and Jernej Pikalo confirm that metaphors such as 'branches of government' and 'head of state' used in describing political situations and processes influence our political perceptions (Carver, Pikalo 2008: 1). Jonathan Charteris-Black develops the argument that in political contexts, metaphor is used for ideological purposes because it activates unconscious emotional associations; metaphors change how we understand and think about politics by influencing our feelings (Charteris-Black 2011: 32) and thereby contribute to myth creation (Charteris-Black 2011: 28). Metaphor is typically used in persuasion and frequently employed in the language of rhetoric and argumentation, such as in political speeches (Charteris-Black 2004: 7). But its use does not end there. It has proven an impressive tool for academic research. But it may happen that the researcher becomes so entranced by the clarity and simplicity of argumentation that metaphor offers that he or she overlooks deeper connections in the phenomenon under study.

Before we examine the central issue in this study, we must first differentiate between the concepts of analogy and metaphor as used in this paper. By 'analogy' we shall intend a perceived similarity between two entities. The 'metaphor' is a higher-level mapping of these similarities that is used to communicate them in the form of a figure of speech. In the current context, the logic is as follows: if in political discourse we speak of politics as a market, we have created a metaphor based on the similarity of properties. If instead we observe that politics involves a competition for voters just as the market mechanism embodies a competition for customers, or that catallactic (i.e. exchange) patterns obtain in politics as they do in the economic market, we have spelled out a concrete similarity and in so doing have pointed out an analogy. Thus, we are analyzing specific similarities between the marketplace and the political system, which we may term analogies, that are subsumed under the market metaphor.

The metaphor may be imagined simply as a set and the analogies it implies as a subset of that metaphor. In a typical deduction, the premises taken together may be said to form a set. Syllogistic reasoning is applied using this set of two or more propositions asserted or assumed to be true to arrive at a conclusion. We may consider an analogy to be a premise ('politics is an exchange', 'politics is a competition'). The metaphor is then the argument, and is more complex ('politics functions as an economic market'). Metaphors always implicitly contain a set of analogies that state some A is like B. A set of such analogies therefore creates the metaphor A is B. We know of no other scholar who works with metaphor and analogy in this particular formulation, but we consider the distinction between analogy and metaphor to be justified.

The approach to metaphor and analogy presented here is complementary to that given in Donald Schön's *Generative Metaphor: a Perspective on Problem-Setting in Social Policy*. The operation of the economic metaphor in politics shares common ground with Schön's generative metaphors. His topic is social policy, and he notes that social policy has more to do with how we frame the objective to be achieved than it does with the selection of the optimal means to achieve it (Schön 1993: 138). 'Such a multiplicity of conflicting stories about the situation makes it dramatically apparent that we are dealing not with 'reality', but with various ways of making sense of reality' (Schön 1993: 149). Inadequate metaphors inevitably give rise to insidiously inadequate solutions, because some are based on an inappropriate or simplistic understanding of the situation.

Generative metaphor is generative in the sense that it generates new perceptions and explanations, and invents reality. So not all metaphors are generative (Schön 1993: 142). But the market metaphor in politics does generate new perceptions and provide new insight into the political process. It is obvious that Schön is aware of the inherent risk that generative metaphors bear, and he calls for critical analysis to uncover their non-analogical connections: 'The notion of generative metaphor then becomes an interpretive tool for the critical analysis of social policy. My point here is not that we ought to think metaphorically about social policy problems, but that we ought to become critically aware of these generative metaphors, to increase the rigor and precision of our analysis of social policy problems by examining the analogies and 'disanalogies' between the familiar descriptions' (Schön 1993: 138–139).

3. Homo Politicus versus Homo Economicus

Economics and political science work on the basis of differing conceptions of the human being. For economics, rationality and rational human behavior are a basic assumption. No objective criterion is available to qualify or assess this rationality, since human preferences are subjective. Such a notion of rationality, therefore, does not refer to preferences and therefore not to goals themselves, but rather to the choice of methods for achieving those goals (Downs 1957: 5). Simply put, the rationality of human behavior means that people are able to find ways to achieve their objectives most efficiently, at minimal cost. From this conception has emerged the ideal we call *homo economicus*. As we will indicate below, the notion was developed by Lionel Robbins (1932: 87–92; Holman 2005: 258).

Many economists, however, protest against a strict interpretation of this notion. Downs refers to it as ‘infamous’ – the rational citizen or *homo politicus* is for him the ‘average man’ (Downs 1957: 7). In *The Twilight of Homo Economicus*, Orrel and Sedláček label it a modern economic myth in its purest form (Sedláček, Orrel 2012: 24). Knapik calls similar concepts and metaphors in economics more than harmful, and says they usually lead (in the minds of market actors) to a suggestion of inherent ethics, with arguments like ‘greed is good’ and ‘markets are perfect’, and notions such as ‘toxic assets’ Knapik (2012: 315). Economic pioneer Thorstein Veblen criticized the model of rational man as being only a distant reality (Veblen 1898: 389). For von Mises, *homo economicus* is an imaginary, hypothetical image, a phantom of speculative philosophy, because no one is motivated exclusively by the desire to become the richest; in fact this is not attractive for many people and it does not move them (von Mises 1949/1996: 62). The economic anthropologist Karl Polanyi, in *The Great Transformation* (1944) and Marcel Mauss in *The Gift* (1924) argue that even in traditional societies, people exchange goods in accordance with the principle of reciprocity rather than what is assumed by the *homo economicus* construct. It is evident that no one entirely conforms to the image of *homo economicus*; no one intends only to maximize their returns and minimize their costs, because we are all influenced by other varied motives.

One of the most interesting critiques to be offered of the *homo economicus* concept is that of Etzioni. The main idea in his book *The Moral Dimension: Toward a New Economics* (1990) is that people are also fulfilled by practicing their moral obligations in society – manifesting altruism, asceticism, self-sacrifice – and given this, ‘economic man’ is only one among many behavioral options, neither inherent in nor the dominant element of human nature. Etzioni thus emphasizes the emotional level as the basis for most human decisions (Etzioni 1990: 89–92). In *On Ethics and Economics* (1991) Sen also points to the selfish aspect of human behavior not being the only variant. There are many kinds of self behavior which deemphasize self-interest, Sen says, and Japan may serve as an example of how self-interest may not necessarily lead to better results or greater efficiency.

Neoclassical economic theory has adopted the *homo economicus* construct as a methodological tool by means of which to explore fictional economic equilibria, which its practitioners consider useful for understanding some phenomena in the real-world economy. The Cambridge School and the Lausanne School take this tack, as did Friedrich Hayek, a member of the Austrian school who examined economic equilibrium and created the concept of catallaxy, an important part of the market metaphor.

The current view even among economists and some political scientists is that this aspect of human beings dominates their nature. Their motivation is rational, and this is true not only in the economic market but also the ‘political market’. The economic theory of politics assumes the existence of a person who is rational (Downs 1957: 4) and who chooses rational goals (Downs 1957: 27). For political party members, this means acting solely to make a profit and to gain prestige and power. Politics becomes reduced to private goals, and political parties formulate their programs to win elections, rather than winning elections to formulate programs and policies (Downs 1957: 28). Politicians within democracies maximize votes, while voters act to maximize their own benefit, benefits they expect as a result of coming to the polls on election day (Downs 1957: 30–31). The consequence of this view is that political ideologies are degraded and defamed in role

and importance. They are reduced to tools for obtaining votes in a competitive struggle (Downs 1957: 113).

If the main objective is to replace *homo economicus* in politics, as well, the economic theory of politics exceeds the boundaries of the autonomous political sphere and the confrontation occurs with an ideal type opposite in nature, *homo politicus*, who, embodying Aristotle's *zoon politikon* or altruistic man, is bound to his community and motivated to act in accordance with the public interest and the public good. But this confrontation occurs not because *homo politicus* is irrational, but because the different conceptualization of rationality is involved. In *Human Irrational Behavior and Economic Reality*, Zafirovski (2003) explains why *homo politicus* is not irrational. He defines several models of rational behavior, and his chief argument is that behavior may be rational not only for economic reasons, but also for reasons not related to economics or even that are overtly irrational within the economic sphere. In other words, nonrational elements in the human psyche need not inevitably be irrational. It would as a consequence be incorrect to equate the irrational with the nonrational (Szczepański 1988: 133–139; Černík et al. 1997: 22). A critique of neoclassical theory in neighboring social sciences lies behind Zafirovski's argument, including of economic rationality spillover, the maximization of utility, and consumer behaviour, exposing the narrow reach of this concept of rationality. Serious doubts are raised about the explanatory viability of rational choice theory is a paradigmatic approach to other social sciences (Zafirovski 2003). We may speak freely of various types of rationality bound to way in which things are acquired in the various areas of human life, and thereby create a richly branched structure of varying rationality types. Even so, pure *homo politicus* remains an abstraction, functioning within an 'autarkic polis', playing the game according to his own rules and within his own 'galaxy'. But it is together with other species of rationality that *homo politicus* designs and creates a common universe that represents our heterogeneous, complex social reality.

Experience shows that metaphors themselves have no deleterious effects, but this depends upon how they are handled and whether manipulation is involved. We cannot expect a pure abstraction or an analogy/metaphor to become reality. To do so would mean that we have fully believed in it, and got carried away to the extent we have lost touch with reality. Problems arise when we begin to explain human behavior using a type of rationality that is not applicable within that sphere, in which other rules of rationality apply, so that one type of rationality attempts to achieve a kind of methodological imperialism in which it not only suppresses variant options and behavioral motives, but also demands that the game be played in a way that observes its own rules and regularities of functioning. We cannot require an analogy or metaphor to become an omnipresent reality.

The economic theory of politics, or more specifically, public choice theory, seeks to replace *homo politicus* by *homo economicus*. If economics is the science of self-interested individuals trading goods and services on the market, public choice theory is a theory of self-interested individuals involved in a complex exchange of public goods in the context of political institutions. The theory calls in the play three elements: *homo economicus*, methodological individualism, and the politics-as-exchange paradigm (Udehn 1996: 35).

4. Politics as Exchange

Aristotle draws a certain analogy between the functioning of the household and that of the state, based upon their common element, the budget unit. Economics derives its name from the Greek name for household, *oikos*. Some economists of the Austrian school have argued that the market embodies *cattalaxy*, being based on exchange rather than *oikos* (Mises 1949/1996: 233). Prior to the Austrian school, Whately had already labeled political economy *catalactics* or the *Science of Exchanges*. He notes that humans might be defined as ‘animals that make exchanges’ (Whately 1855: 4). August Friedrich von Hayek contended that *cattalaxy* means not only ‘to exchange’ but also ‘to admit in the community’ and ‘the change from enemies into friends’, and he defines *cattalaxy* as ‘the order brought about by the mutual adjustment of many individual economies in a market’ (Hayek 1976/1998: 108–109). But Hayek identifies *cattalaxy* with the market system, which is, after all, based on the natural and financial exchange of goods and services. *Catalactics* may be characterized as the practical means by which the free market system reaches exchange relationships. Buchanan goes a step further: the state and political theory are *catalactics*. The state may engage in exchanges with other countries or firms, but there may also be some kind of non-market exchange within the state apparatus (Udehn 1966: 116). The ‘political market’ has peculiarities that make it different to the economic market: there is a single seller, the state; thus, with the exception of elections, when competition arises between political parties, the political market is monopolistic. The number of buyers is great, but in contrast to buyers on the economic market, the relations between actors are asymmetrical in terms of power, rationality, information and the possibility to persuade (Downs 1957: 83).

Almond points out that politics as exchange is only one of several metaphors used to study politics (Almond 1991: 36). A few more analogical similarities to politics may be listed: politics as a play, as a theater performance, a sport, a deliberative forum. These discussions are equally part of the normative and positive readings of political theory. The former are based on ideas of how political reality should be constructed, as with the public choice theorists. Downs admits that political transactions are not in ‘tit for tat’ form in the way that private market transactions are (Downs 1960: 547–551). Rather, taxes are exacted by coercive force and there is no direct link between what citizens give to government and what they receive.

Talking in this way about transactions or exchange in politics is partly metaphorical, but primarily normative (public choice theorists are never tired of complaining that there is no direct relationship between what citizens pay in the form of taxes and what they get in the form of public goods and transfers; they wish for politics to function as a market): ‘ideally, the fiscal process is a transaction type *quid pro quo* between the government and all individuals’ (Buchanan 1949: 499). Other authors’ positive reasoning is based upon the analogy, which holds that aside from some particulars, political behavior is reminiscent of market behavior. But these particulars in many cases are significant, and this would seem to render the market metaphor inappropriate *de facto*.

The most obvious examples of political exchange arise between politicians themselves: logrolling, vote trading in parliaments, and the same in parliamentary committees. Buchanan and Tullock reject arguments that deny economic behavior in politics as an expression of ancient social ethics that despised trade and those who engaged in it. For them, trading is

precisely the true spirit of democracy (Udehn 1996: 118–119). But trading is visible in situations in which minorities try to acquire or exercise a certain influence, and thus get out from under the tyranny of the majority. The more appropriate way of influencing political issues is persuasion by argument. And if some kind of exchange must take place, let it be an exchange of ideas in the political forum.

An element of exchange may be found as well in the relationship between politicians and interest groups, or those who represent them: lobbyists. Of course an element of exchange is present whenever politicians offer policies in exchange for financial contributions to their political campaigns. Lobbying is a tool of strategic information transfer, in which lobbyists use persuasion to convince politicians of the correctness and popularity of certain policies (Austen-Smith 1993: 799). It is expected that politicians will be responsive to the needs of citizens without getting something in return. Lobbying is one way, however imperfect, to make politicians aware of people's will. Politicians may be said to exchange policies for public support, but that is just a metaphor and not an indication of an actual market 'exchange': there is no market, no price mechanism, no clearly defined goods or services, nor any trading terms or conditions (Udehn 1996: 119–120).

The relationship between bureaucrats (civil servants) and politicians also includes some kind of exchange functioning as a bilateral monopoly. This relationship is analyzed by W. Niskanen: '*Bureaucrats offer the performance of certain activities and expect for it increased budget for these activities*' (Niskanen 1971: 25). Politicians, in turn, may indirectly gain support in the polls from bureaucrats or reelection (Niskanen 1971: 137). M. Weber was conscious of the fact that government officials and politicians are not market actors. The essence of his views about the theory of bureaucracy is the conviction that politics is a struggle for power and that no exchange-based relationship exists between the bureaucracy and elected politicians, but there is a preferential relationship of political authority (Weber 1922/1978).

The final relationship related to some form of exchange is that between politicians (parties) and voters. As we will see, as in the previous examples, this relationship is not an example of traditional exchange, either absolutely or in the economic sense. The relationship between politicians and voters is primarily a relationship of representation. Voters, in exchange for their vote, do not receive any specific policy. Voters 'do not buy' policy, but 'buy' political programs and election promises. So the relationship between votes and policies remains less clear (Udehn 1996: 122–123).

5. Politics as Competition

Competition is integral to the market process. 'Competition is the process by which market participants, in pursuing their own interests, attempt to outdo, outprice, outproduce, and outmaneuver each other. Competition does not occur between buyer and seller, but among buyers or among sellers.' (Heyne et al. 2005, Chapters 2 and 3). The economic theory of politics is partially based upon an analogy between party competition and market competition. This theory posits that elections consist of the competition between political parties. This competition is not necessarily economic, but carried out by non-economic means. In this section, we shall

briefly deal with the limits of the spatial theory of mass elections and outline the sociological theory of party competition, derived from the theory of democracy by J. A. Schumpeter. We intend by this competition in the broad sense – we cannot separate competition from the creation and shifting of individual preferences, nor supply from the man, nor the process of persuasion from voter rationality.

The spatial theory of party competition deserves attention because over time it has become one of the most impressive-ever theories of political science, although the metaphor does have its limits. It's greatest strength, thanks to the simplicity of its assumptions and the clarity of the spatial image, is its wonderful simplicity and heuristic power (Udehn 1996: 124). Let us briefly recollect what spatial theory brings.

It assumes the existence of a compact one-dimensional space, in which the proposed policies of political parties constitute points. Voters have definite preferences and vote for the party whose program lies closest to their own position. The aim of the parties is to win elections, and each party proposes a policy that maximizes votes in its favor to achieve this objective (Ortuño-Ortín 1997: 427). Downs, in his work, developed the ideas of Hotelling who, thirty years earlier, had been occupied with the question of why two competing firms are often situated in close proximity near the middle of the spatial market. Hotelling demonstrated that two rival firms converge towards neighboring positions in the middle of the market; firms may move to the middle to increase their market share, until equilibrium is attained. He knew that by using such a model, and replacing consumers with voters and transport costs with ideological distance costs, he would be able to explain why the Democratic and Republican parties in the USA so often are located near the center of the liberal-conservative spectrum (Stokes 1963: 368–369). Downs then transformed this phenomenon of a two-party system, in which parties attract new voters when they adapt programs to the median voter, from a simple metaphor and common sense theory into a formal theory of social science (Udehn 1996: 124). But the weakness of a simple theory lies precisely in the fact of its simplicity. And unfortunately, in the social sciences, simplicity has always implied simplification and a consequent lack of realism (Udehn 1996: 125).

Stokes posits four critical axioms and sets the spatial model and a more comprehensive contacts able to cover a greater number of variable conditions (Stokes 1963). The modified spatial theory of party competition has developed from this critique of spatial theory which is more open to the assumption of multidimensionality. It has come in the form of empirical applications of the spatial theory of elections, not only to two-party systems, but also to multiparty systems (Thurner 2000: 493–517). But the market metaphor is lost in this empirical modeling. Its development was partially contradictory: each step towards greater complexity, scientific rigor, and mathematical sophistication was also a step away from simplicity and transparency. Another consequence was that the spatial theory of elections has become interesting to only that minority of numerate political scientists able to cope with the mathematics. For the rest, it has become inaccessible (Udehn 1996: 125–126).

The minimal predictive power of spatial theory stems from its dependence on the unrealistic assumption of complete information. Candidates are often poorly informed about voter preferences, and what they do know, they know only from opinion polls, with no idea whether or not respondents will vote. Candidates' proper choice of policy is a choice made under uncertainty as is the choice of voters (1996: 126).

The problem with the economic interpretation is that it does not assume voters evaluate the moral qualities of candidates, and public choice theory indeed claims they have no such qualities. Either public choice theorists or the voters are wrong. But if the voters are wrong to believe candidates have moral qualities, this means they are not rational, and the economic approach assumes they are (Udehn 1996: 128–129). Spatial theory and the economic approach assume stable, fixed voter preferences, so persuasive methods, the means of changing voter preferences, are beyond the reach of the economic theory of politics. In his article labeled *Economic Imperialism*, Tullock wrote: ‘Economists in general have been little interested in the preferences that individuals have. They assume the preferences and then deduce what the outcome is but they do not pay much attention to investigation of these preferences. Traditionally, an economist will tell you that this is a problem for psychologist rather than the economist. In practice, however, it is not only the problem for psychologists, it has to a very large extent been the problem of the sociologist and of the behavioralist political scientists’ (Tullock 1972: 323).

An excellent combination to this debate comes from Hirschman, who disagrees with economists about fixed, unchanging, stable preferences. He recognizes *exit* and *voice*. While the first is pertinent to economic expression, the second is a feature of political action. ‘The customer, who, dissatisfied with the product of one firm, shifts to that of another and he also sets in motion market forces, which may induce recovery on the part of the firm that has declined in comparative performance. This is the sort of mechanism economics thrives on. It is neat – one either exits or one does not; it is impersonal – any face-to-face confrontation between customer and firm; and it is indirect – any recovery on the part of declining firm comes by courtesy of the Invisible Hand. In all these respects, voice is just the opposite of exit. It is far more ‘messy’ concept because it can be graduated, all the way from faint grumbling to violent protest; it implies articulation of one’s critical opinions rather than a private, ‘secret’ vote in the anonymity of supermarket. Voice is political action par excellence’ (Hirschman 1970: 15–16). On this basis, Henneberg sees a similarity between politics and services as more reasonable than between politics and products. In his opinion, voters are not really customers, but rather resemble clients (Henneberg 2004: 232).

In a later work, *Shifting Involvements* (1982), Hirschman picks up on the work of Frankfurt, drawing a distinction between two types of preferential changes: 1) nonreflective changes in taste, and 2) reflective changes in values (Hirschman 1982: 69). Behind this distinction is a theory of tastes and values consisting of two types of preferences associated with preferences of first order and second-order metapreferences. Economists normally deal with first-order preferences, exposed by agents when they buy goods and services. The starting point for the concept of metapreferences lies in a general statement about human nature: that men and women have the ability to step back from their demonstrated preferences, needs, and volitions, and are able to ask themselves if they really desire these needs and prefer these preferences. They then shape metapreferences in a way that may differ from their preferences. He argues that the ability to retreat is purely human, but it is not present in all people. Those in whom this ability is lacking, Frankfurt named *wantons*, whom he viewed as nonreflective and captured by their whims and passions (Hirschman 1982: 69). Economists focus on these preferential changes, which are random and mostly smaller changes in tastes. For ‘non-wantons’, by contrast, changes in preference are not really changes in taste (given that taste is defined

as a preference about which we do not argue – *de gustibus non est disputandum*) (Hirschman 1984: 90). A taste we discuss with others or ourselves is called a ‘value’ but if a change in preferences has been preceded by the formation of a metapreference, this is primarily a change in values and not in taste (Hirschman 1984: 90). Change of preference in the market works differently than it does in politics

At this point, we wish to demonstrate how the paradigm of the market and market competition has captured the public space. Habermas has noted the phenomenon in his critique of public opinion, and has taken the view that competition in liberal democracies is already entirely like competition among firms in the economic marketplace: ‘Consequently the parties and their auxiliary organizations see themselves forced to influence voting decisions publicistically in a fashion that has its analogue in the way advertising pressure bears on buying decisions. There emerges the industry of political marketing. Party agitators and old style propagandists give way to advertising experts neutral in respect to party politics and employed to sell politics in an unpolitical way’ (Habermas 1962/1991: 216). His concept is derived not from the economic theory of politics, but is rather a part of the sociological theory of symbolic politics in which Habermas focuses on advertising, the element of persuasion that is exogenous to the economic theory of politics (Udehn 1996: 136). ‘Arguments are transmuted into symbols, to which again one cannot respond by arguing, but only by identifying with them’ (Habermas 1962/1991: 206). ‘Hence the presentation of the leader or the leader’s team plays a central role; they need to be packaged and displayed too in a way that makes them marketable’ (Habermas 1962/1991: 218).

Schumpeter was the first link in the development of the economic theory of democracy, because he also depicts the competitive struggle among candidates and parties for the votes of voters. This lends credibility to the interpretation of the economic approach, but other elements of the theory point in a different direction (Udehn 1996: 137). First, Schumpeter criticizes the assumption that voters act rationally. ‘In particular, we still remain under the practical necessity of attributing to the will of the individual independence and a rational quality that are altogether unrealistic. If we are to argue that the will of the citizens per se is a political factor entitled to respect, it must first exist. That is to say, it must be something more, than an indeterminate bundle of vague impulses, loosely playing about given slogans and mistaken impressions. Everyone would have to know definitely what he wants to stand for.’ (Schumpeter 1942/2003: 253) Second, he does not assume fixed preferences. Professional politicians compete not through politics, but through persuasion, and thus do they shape the will of the people. ‘Human nature in politics being what it is, they [the professional politicians] are able to fashion and, within very wide limits, even to create the will of the people. What we are confronted with in the analysis of political processes is largely not a genuine but a manufactured will.’ (Schumpeter 1942/2003: 263) Edelman, who gave symbolic theory its name, writes that the public in fact ignores political issues and is not interested in them. The public perceives only political actions; speech makes these either symbolically threatening or assuring, and it is to these performances and speeches that the public response, rather than to direct knowledge of the facts (Edelman 1965: 172). Thus, political actions shape political needs and ‘knowledge’, not the other way around (Edelman 1965: 72). To phrase it as an economist would, supply creates demand.

Schumpeter borrowed an image of any irrational, irresponsible citizen-voter who acts impulsively from the sociological theory of elites. This image of the voter, which is contrary

to the ideals of the Enlightenment, was widely confirmed during the behavioral revolution, when sociologists and political scientists began to ask people questions about politics. They were dismayed to discover that the typical voter is not the ideal citizen according to classical democratic theory (Udehn 1996: 140). Key sought passionately to rehabilitate the image of the voter in his book *The Responsible Electorate*. He did so mainly by expecting less of the typical voter. 'From our analyzes, the voter emerges as a person, who appraises the actions of government, who has policy preferences, and who relates his vote to those appraisals and preferences.' (Key 1966: 58) Ultimately, he reaches very similar a view of democracy, as it was perceived by Schumpeter, but also Popper: 'The only really effective weapon of popular control in a democratic regime is the capacity of the electorate to throw a party from power.' (Key 1966: 76) Parsons emphasizes the habitual aspect of elections as a sign of stability: while Downs solves uncertainty with the help of ideology as a way of cutting information costs, Parsons suggests that the majority of voters vote by custom as a matter of habit. People vote to express affection towards some party and to express their solidarity with other people voting for the same party. In many cases, voting is a traditional, expressive act of solidarity with the (social) group and identification with the party. To the extent that political campaigns are without effect, they perform only a ritual function (Udehn 1996: 142–143).

We share the view of the French philosopher Manin, who argues that to characterize voters as consumers is less than adequate. Market competition among producers is justifiable because it favors producers, who produce good at the lowest price. Finally, the consumer chooses the product made by the most competitive producer. Purchasing goods from producers will allow them to devote more resources to other purchases. If the consumer makes a mistake in choosing – by not choosing the product made by the most efficient producer – self-penalization will occur and the consumer will be disadvantaged straightaway (Manin et al. 1987: 355–56).

Then there is the issue of the need for political persuasion. Citizens must be persuaded to make decisions and adopt policies, because the effects of their choices are not immediately perceptible. On the market, by contrast, individuals feel the impact of their choices immediately and directly (Manin et al. 1987: 356). In addition, consumers enter the marketplace knowing their own needs. They may choose new products they had not previously sought, but those they select will conform to their initial needs. When citizens enter the political forum, by contrast, they do not know exactly what they wish or need; their preferences are yet to be shaped and will develop as they listen to public debates (Manin et al. 1987: 356).

Manin reaches a conclusion similar to that of Schumpeter, who has acknowledged that in politics, there is no such thing as demand independently of supply. Schumpeter insists that in some fields, it is unreasonable to assume voters have well-defined volitions independent of the proposals of politicians (Manin 1997: 225). Schumpeter speaks of that domain in which individuals do have individual volition, particularly as related directly to our personal lives and the people and things close to us: our family, hobbies, friends, towns and villages, churches, the organizations to which we belong, matters that affect us and that are well-known – and this even without the mainstream mass media shaping our opinions (Schumpeter 1942/2003: 277). As we move away from this collection of interests, we come to national and international interests, and when it comes to these, it may be assumed that individuals do not have a clearly formulated individual will (Schumpeter 1942/2003: 279).

6. Conclusion

This article has discussed analogies drawn between the market system and politics as used by both politicians and political scientists to explain and argue positions, with differing positive and normative implications for the functioning of the political system. The topic has often been neglected in Central European social sciences. It is, however, vital to pose questions about how we perceive politics. The benefit of this paper is the way we have analyzed the market metaphor and deconstructed the particular analogies that it implies. We have thus managed to unmask the inviolability attributed to the market metaphor often regarded as indisputable, and to reveal the illusory, spontaneous nature of the analogies by which we interpret social and political reality. Moreover, we have attempted to reconcile the views of authors usually set against one another – the Kantian/deontological political scientist versus the political marketing theorist – and have shown such sharply cut positions have no justification.

Initially, we outlined the difference between the notions of analogy and metaphor, and used this template to analyze the issue at hand. ‘Analogy’ and ‘metaphor’ do not commute semantically – they cannot be taken as synonyms. To do so, as is done in the social sciences, is often confusing. Highlighting this defect is what we consider to be the key contribution of this paper. Literary science is clear about the difference between the terms ‘analogy’ and ‘metaphor’: it does not blend the two. In this paper, we have outlined a way to distinguish the two in our context and have based our investigation on the conceptual precision provided. With Donald Schön, we have identified the market metaphor as a generative metaphor, and thus novel perceptions of politics may be generated that are inadequate, as we have seen above.

In the first section we identified two concepts of human beings in the social sciences: *homo economicus* and *homo politicus*. We argued that if we employ a pure ideal of rationality within a sphere to which it is alien, methodological inconsistency or inadequacy may result. The economic theory of politics seeks to supplant *homo economicus* with *homo politicus*. We have noted that one such attempt is tied to economic imperialism in public choice theory. The rationality attributed to *homo economicus* appears too narrow in scope and gives rise to serious doubts about the explanatory viability of the economic theory of politics as a paradigmatic approach to political science. There is, of course, some indication of the existence of *homo economicus* within politics. But this metaphor, which is becoming passé in economic theory, is still made facile use of in political science.

The second section dealt with forms of exchange in politics. The ‘political’ market has some special features which set it apart from economic markets. A political exchange is of a completely different character than an economic exchange, for one. Use of the metaphor in this context is appropriate for illustration purposes, but only if not carried to the point that a normative requirement on the performance of individual political processes is imposed.

In the third section, we examined the limits of the spatial theory of mass elections and outlined a sociological theory of party competition derived from the theories of Schumpeter. We noted the weakness of the theory’s simplicity for social science, because it may lead to simplification and a consequent lack of realism. Empirical modeling leads by contrast to greater complexity, distancing it from the simplicity of the spatial theory, and the analogy with the marketplace gradually recedes. Hirschman’s concepts *exit* and *voice* in the discussion of stable voter preferences helps show that the process of preference change on the market functions

differently than it does in politics. We agree with Schumpeter, who assumes no fixed preferences, but rather states that politicians compete through persuasion, thereby shaping the will of the people. Manin confirms the necessity of political persuasion and correctly describes the differences between consumers and their behavior on the economic market, and certain illusion about the same kind of consumers in politics.

In general, we have attempted to demonstrate in our text that the concrete analogies contained within the market metaphor, although disposed of surface similarities, nevertheless possess internal peculiarities that generate clear differences in the logic of their functioning and behavior of the respective systems. Our conclusion is that thinking in this way about political phenomena and processes has its limits, and that the individual analogies are partially appropriate to the object to which they are applied. A number of errors thereby arise, from distorting and deforming the image of politics and oversimplifying, to serious misunderstandings and misinterpretations of politics and democracy.

It is evident, then, that the methodological basis for studying politics cannot be reduced solely to that used for studying economic processes. Reality is too complex, influenced by other factors like power relations and relations of political authority, sociological and psychological aspects of the motives and actions taken by human beings, group behavior and the behavior of society as a whole. In its final consequences moreover, to abstract politics from these factors means to leave the political sphere and to leave democratic politics open to influences that erode the public space, dissolve the Demos, and depoliticize and marketize political struggle. These influences may a theater performance or show out of politics, requiring as they do exclusively passive spectators who gradually become civic 'invalids': they are able only to applaud or throw tomatoes. Democratic politics (and policies) should be more than just a product intended for final consumption, purpose-designed to obtain as many votes as possible. None of us wishes to be the victim of a cynical calculus of self-interested politicians.

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