

'The Impossibility of Politics' by Howard Richards- An outline of the argument

First thesis

1. Thesis: politics today is impossible.
2. To make sense of this thesis, it is necessary to define the words 'politics' and 'impossible.'
3. Methodology for defining 'politics:' distil a definition out of two works produced in Western culture that established a sense of what politics means.
 - A. To consider: *Plato's Republic*
 - B. And the *Politics* of Aristotle
 - C. 'Distil', in this case, means to exclude what does not fit with humanism, for which purpose we filter out of the classic texts the endorsements of slavery, exclusion of women, exclusion of workers, etc
4. Conclusion: Definition of 'politics:' the art of governance, which is inseparable from education and ethics.
 - A. An agreed sub-text, following Plato and Aristotle, is that governance is 'to lead for the greater good'.
 - B. Just as a pilot navigates his ship to safe harbor.
 - C. The word *govern* stems from Greek and Latin words that signify the work of a pilot.
 - D. To govern – just like other work – requires *episteme* (that is to say specialized knowledge); *techne*; and *agathon* (a good to aim for).
5. Methodology for defining 'impossible.'
 - A. Demonstrate that the current situation is ungovernable
 - B. That this ungovernability is neither transitory nor temporary
 - C. It is a result of basic cultural structure, that is to say, of the basic rules of capitalism and of modern society.
6. Contributions by Jürgen Habermas: *Legitimation Crisis*, 1975
 - A. According to Habermas, there are four social structures in history: archaic, traditional, liberal capitalist and late capitalist
 - B. Further, he states there are three sectors in late capitalism: a private economy that is still competitive, but with low profits and little dynamism; a viable and dynamic private oligopoly sector; a public economy that includes industries dependent on the state, such as the arms industry.

- C. He recognizes three social systems: economic, political-administrative, and cultural
- D. Late capitalism re-politicizes the economy.
- E. The main function of the state is to guide the economy to ensure it is internationally competitive, its growth, and a sufficient surplus to finance a welfare state, as well as to fund the running costs of the state.
- F. The costs of the state increase, for a number of reasons.
- G. Due to the legal framework (of a liberal democracy), the power of the state is very limited in terms of guiding the economy or redistributing surplus (capital flight).
- H. This leads to a financial crisis of the state.
- I. The permanent gap between the objectives of the state and its actual achievements nullifies the state's legitimacy.
- J. The cultural system loses its capacity to socialize its citizens into living up to their roles.
- K. The state's interventions to stimulate the economy result in inflation or mounting public debt or both.

7. Contributions by Michel Foucault (*Society Must Be Defended*, 2003)

- A. Foucault analyzed the historic basis for the liberal democratic state
- B. He starts his argument rejecting the myth of the social contract, but ends his argument acknowledging that it is the dominant myth
- C. The myth establishes both the legitimacy of the sovereign nation and its commitment to respect private property.
- D. Despite being a myth, it carries the weight of a historic and political discourse through its power, at times enforced by military force.
- E. Western institutions (now globalized) have organized themselves around this legal myth.

8. Contributions by Michal Kalecki (*Political Aspects of Full Employment*, 1944)

- A. Given the physical necessity (to get production going) for confidence that investments will provide a good return, capital has the power of an indirect veto over public policy.
- B. Kalecki sees politics as a permanently inconclusive battle between those who have almost all the money, and those who have almost all the votes.

9. Contributions by Jeffrey Winters (*Power in Motion, Capital Mobility and the Indonesian State*, 1996)

- A. We are currently experiencing the early stages of a locational revolution, whereby the power to determine the laws is passing to

- companies and investors, who decide where they will locate their operations and investments.
- B. Governability varies, in inverse proportion to mobility: that is to say the least moveable wealth, such as mineral resources in the earth, is the most governable; while the most moveable wealth, such as cash, is the least governable.
 - C. The liberal legal framework comes to contain the states and the global economy.
10. Definition of 'impossible:' incompatible with the liberal rule of law, now solidly established.

Second Thesis

- 11. Thesis: There are viable actions that will lead to a future in which politics will be possible.
- 12. There is a transformational general philosophy known as *Unbounded Organization*
 - A. The goal: life
 - B. The method: seek, create, evaluate and review those institutions that best serve the final goal (similar to Popper's 'open society').
 - C. A pro social communitarian ethic: "a social attitude" (Alberto Hurtado)
- 13. According to Buckminster Fuller, specific transformational actions are called 'trimtab' (the little rudder that changes the direction of the main rudder which, in turn, changes the course of the ship); 'trimtabs' are *a)* achievable and *b)* tend toward governability.
- 14. Liberal ideology is ever more incompatible with the current state of science:
 - A. It contains multiple supporting points in common with the Newtonian physics that has now been superseded by current knowledge.
 - B. It is incompatible with anthropology.
 - C. It has been superseded by a valuable current philosophy known as Critical Realism – a movement that revisits worthwhile topics from Marxist, pragmatic, analytic and phenomenological traditions. CR also addresses post-modern skepticism.
 - D. It has been superseded by economic solidarity, which reframes economic sciences by integrating the broader motivations of spirituality and psychology
 - E. Etc.
- 15. To make politics possible, it is insufficient to dissolve the intellectual authority of the liberal rule of law..

16. 'Trimtabs' are also needed to deactivate the mechanisms of ungovernability, including the locational revolution, the veto on public politics resulting from the need for investor confidence, and the fiscal crisis of the state.

17. Addressing the locational revolution:
 - A. Trimtab (TT): start with the government of the least moveable resources.
 - B. TT Prohibit short term speculative investment unrelated to the real economy
 - B. TT: Develop companies tied to one place, jobs that do not move
 - C. TT: Negotiate the best deal for the public making a variety of capital sources compete with each other
 - D. TT: Tie capital to territory
 - E. TT: Foment cultures of social responsibility
 - F. TT: Give preference to those who practice social responsibility

18. Liberation from the need for confidence (i.e.from the dependence of everyone on the accumulation of capital by the few) TT:
 - A. Decommodification
 - B. Promote detailed studies of realities on the ground more than abstract models.in the social sciences (follow the second Wittgenstein not the first)
 - C. Plurality of material practice, strengthening alternatives to the dynamics of capitalist accumulation.
 - D. Popular economy (i.e. small businesses and self employment that does not accumulate capital but just makes a living (Corragio))
 - E. Meaningful lives that are not dependent on sales.
 - F. Not exaggerate the dangers of capital flight and disinvestment: negotiate win-win solutions.

19. *Addressing the financial crisis of the state TT:*
 - A. Negotiate co-operation between the large oligopolistic companies, without trying to establish a liberal utopia of perfect competition.
 - B. Re-signify the large companies as social institutions generating surplus.
 - C. Moral education informed by current psychology.
 - D. Re-establish sources of financing for the democratic state that were formerly at the disposal of kings (e.g. to coin money and charge interest on it, ownership of land and resources, tariffs, monopolies).
 - E. Learn from the experience of the Swedish Model:
 - a). The Post-War Swedish Model was abandoned for reasons common to the decline of social democracy everywhere, most significantly due to the unsustainable financial burden on the state

b). To overcome the challenges faced by social democracy, it is necessary to rethink the rule of law on the foundation (*Grundnorm*) of human rights, including making real the social rights that now exist on paper; and on the foundations of the social functions of institutions, writing into constitutions the social functions of markets and the social functions of property

The essay *The Impossibility of Politics* forms part of the book REPENSAR LA POLITICA EN UN MUNDO COMPLEJO published in Spanish by Universitas, www.uvirtual.net

The complete text of *The Impossibility of Politics* is available in English at www.unboundedorganization.org

The complete text of the Spanish original is available at www.repensar.cl searching under *autores* and then under Richards, Howard.