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Concepts of Agonistic Democracy

Since the beginning of the 1990s, a new model of democratic politics has been presented by a number of normative political theorists. The so-called ‘agonistic democracy’ has been elaborated by such authors as Chantal Mouffe, William E. Connolly and Bonnie Honig. Although their thought stemmed from different backgrounds, they employed the same basic concept, namely that of agonism. Agonistic theorists perceive democratic politics not as a conflict between enemies, but rather as a contest or competition between adversaries.

The basic question of the thesis is therefore this: which intellectual contexts accompanied the birth of the concepts of agonistic democracy in the normative political theory in the last decade of the 21st century? It may be argued, that these concepts, even though arising from different intellectual sources, has been inspired by at least three factors: post-structural philosophy, an exhaustion of the debate between liberals and communitarians, and by the new geopolitical order after the fall of the Eastern Block.

Research on the origins and development of the agonistic political theory remains scattered and may be considered unsatisfactory. The presented thesis tries to fill this gap by presenting, on the one hand, the historical inspirations of modern agonistic theory, and, on the other hand, its contemporary reception and future perspectives.

The thesis consists of five chapters. The first chapter traces the origins of concepts of *agon* and *agonism*. To bring forward the most important meanings of these concepts it is necessary not only to study various usages of the word *ἀγών* in the Ancient Greek literature, but also its modern interpretations by Swiss cultural historian Jacob Burckhardt, Friedrich Nietzsche, Hannah Arendt, Johan Huizinga, Roger Caillois, Michel Foucault and Jean-François Lyotard. The second chapter presents the agonistic theory of Chantal Mouffe and her concept of agonistic pluralism. Mouffe’s vision of agonism is rooted in her (and Ernesto Laclau’s) post-marxist discourse theory that she combined with reinterpretation of concept of the political, proposed by Carl Schmitt. The third chapter introduces the works of William E. Connolly, along with his idea of agonistic respect. Connolly’s perspective is informed mainly by Nietzsche and Foucault, but it also has to be read against the backdrop of American debates on pluralism. The fourth chapter shows Bonnie Honig’s agonistic approach to normative political theory. Honig based her approach on Arendt’s conception of the self and applied that perspective to criticize both liberal and communitarian thinkers. The fifth chapter presents not only the definitions and

typologies of the theories of agonistic democracy, but also the most characteristic critical opinions on these theories.