

Summary

of the habilitation thesis

About squaring the circle? Good society, Civil society, Free society

of the candidate

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In my habilitation thesis entitled *About Squaring the Circle? Good Society, Civil Society, Free Society*, I propose to outline an intellectual autobiography structured around a central question of political philosophy: under what conditions can a society of welfare, civility, and freedom simultaneously exist? The metaphor of “squaring the circle” – taken from Ralf Dahrendorf (2002), can be considered a kind of guiding thread of a research program carried out over more than two decades of activity and in different research directions, through which I programmatically ignore the resignation towards an impossibility considered obvious, trying to explore with the conceptual and theoretical tools of political philosophy and institutional analysis, the conditions of possibility of this desideratum. Explicitly, the realization of the habilitation thesis assumes a framework of analysis founded on methodological and ontological individualism and epistemological systemism. In other words, the fundamental presupposition of this society is complexity, which requires the individual as the primary unit of analysis from a moral and political point of view, and as an understanding of the social order, an interpretation appropriate to the structure and systemic mechanisms of human interactions.

Three convergent axes will be outlined in the habilitation thesis proposal. The first axis, that of political philosophy, investigates, in conjunction, the question of freedom as a fundamental problem (not as a natural given) and the question of conflict as a constitutive element of any legitimate democratic order. Both put forward the idea that the world of people is a world of options and that politics is not a field of objectivity and morality, but only of choosing some of these while sacrificing all the others. The recourse to politics from

this point of view represents a space that dislocates an intrinsic conflict. Starting from a reinterpretation of the Hobbesian problem – that the absence of political order destroys freedom, not preserves it –, I believe that one of the fundamental stakes of political philosophy is to defend the idea of the necessity of the state in libertarian, not authoritarian, terms, the logical and moral amendment in keeping it in line with them being that any morally and functionally desirable political construction must have as its starting point and normative benchmark voluntary individual choices (individual options). I elaborate on this thesis in my book, *Effectiveness or Democracy? Philosophical Dilemmas Regarding the Role of Political Institutions* (2016), where I identify nine paradoxes in pursuing the desired functionality of democratic institutions – of participation, representation, efficiency, consensus, and others –, paradoxes that do not undermine democracy but circumscribe its desired functionality to self-reflection and continuous revision.

The second axis concerns the philosophy of social sciences and institutional theory. In the volume *Evolutionism vs. Institutional Constructivism* (2017), I subject to a critical comparative examination the two major explanatory traditions regarding the emergence and functioning of institutions — the emergentist model (Smith, Hayek, North etc.) and that of rational design (Coase, Buchanan, Hodgson etc.) — proposing a combined model of “socio-economic man”, capable of integrating the cognitive and operational limits of the individual with the structural influence of the institutional environment. I conclude that institutions create order through freedom, not against it, and that their legitimacy cannot be separated from either the voluntary consent of individuals or the context in which their interactions evolve.

The third axis, growing in recent years, concerns theories of justice, equality, and deliberative democracy, with contributions on universal basic income, compulsory voting, civil disobedience, the limits of freedom of expression, and the culture of cancellation. Common to these contributions is the argument that procedural efficiency alone is insufficient for democratic legitimacy and that any political decision remains contestable and subject to revision. The assumption of these contributions is to emphasize, through different but robust arguments, that the connection between what is necessary, legitimate and just is not a necessary or intrinsic one, but contingent, empirical, a discovery that has both epistemic and moral value, coming to show the limits both at the level of procedural (institutional) expectations and at the level of the results anticipated through them.

Related to scientific results, I mention that I am the author of two monographs published by the University of Bucharest Publishing House, of a textbook in the process of publication (*Political and Social Institutions. An Introduction to Institutional Analysis*) intended for both students and other categories interested in the topic of institutions, and of a significant number of articles published in national and international specialized journals, including volumes edited by Springer Nature (2026). I have participated in over 60 national and international conferences, with appearances at prestigious institutions in the United Kingdom, France, Sweden, Switzerland, Portugal, Hungary, Bulgaria, Serbia, and Macedonia. I am a founding member of the Center for Research in Applied Ethics (CCEA) and, for two years, a member of Societas Ethica – The European Society for Research in Ethics. This year I participated in the international conference dedicated to Thomas Hobbes, the first conference organized in his hometown of Malmesbury (United Kingdom), at the Eighth International Colloquium on Philosophy and Economics, organized in Nancy (France), and in July 2026, I will give a lecture at the 18th Conference of the International Society for Utilitarian Studies, at the University of Macau (China).

Since 2002, I have had a constant teaching activity at the Faculty of Philosophy of the University of Bucharest (except for the legal period of two years of maternity leave between 2010 and 2012), where I have held courses and seminars on *Political and Social Philosophy*, *Political and Social Institutions*, *Political Doctrines*, for the bachelor's and master's programs in interdisciplinary programs. Since 2010, I have been the head of the *Political and Social Institutions* course, and since 2018, of the *Political and Social Philosophy* course. I am also the head of the *Equality and Gender* courses in the EASAO master's program and the Modern Political Thought course in the PPE master's program. For two years, I have been teaching and holding seminars within the Didactic master's program. I have coordinated numerous bachelor's theses and dissertations and contributed to the training of several generations of students, some of whom later joined prestigious international universities. For this activity, I was awarded the title "Bologna Professor" at the Bologna Professor Gala, Timișoara, 2018.

As future projects, I propose to complete several research directions initiated during my participation in international conferences over the past six years, including an annotated anthology of political philosophy, but also to deepen my studies on utilitarianism and the conflict between civility, well-being and freedom, to continue my research on the conditions

of crises, a specific interest being the crisis of contemporary democracies, the crisis of education and the impact of digital technologies, as well as to supervise doctoral theses in the area of political philosophy and institutional analysis.

In conclusion, I believe that the habilitation thesis reflects a coherent academic career, guided by a substantial intellectual project: understanding the normative and institutional conditions of individual freedom in a complex democratic world. The contributions in this direction have sought to combine philosophical rigor with the tools of institutional analysis and rational choice theory, positioning me at the fertile theoretical and practical intersection of political philosophy, the philosophy of the social sciences, and the theory of democracy.