Depoliticization as a Source of Permanent Revolution. François Guizot’s Criticism of the Eclipse of Polis

This article discusses François Guizot’s concept of the eclipse of the political sphere as a source of permanent ideological and political revolution. Guizot presents the idea of the political as mediation between the most valuable forces of civil society, implying that freedom of action will be ensured to outstanding, enterprising individuals. At the same time, he assumed in a premodern manner that both social and political power relations were natural. In this way, Guizot wanted to reconcile the classical philosophy of politics, understood as the art of good living, with liberal slogans of individual freedom and the free market. He presents a picture of society in which responsible individuals, cultivating civic virtues, benefit from liberal freedom and at the same time respect its social conditions: family, religion, property, etc. According to Guizot, such a social order will favour the formation of a natural elite, consisting of people that combine the management of civil society with political power. The notion that liberal ideas can be combined with the traditions of classical political philosophy determined Guizot’s assessment of the French Revolution: he viewed the events of 1789 as a way of expressing vital social forces and therefore, even more than other liberals, he separated the first period of the revolution from the Reign of Terror which, in his opinion, being apolitical, did not distort liberal ideals, but denied them.

The main threat, according to Guizot, was breaking the connection between the political sphere and civil society, caused by the ideologization of the state on the one hand, and on the other, the perception of the state only as a means for achieving particular claims.

According to the author, Guizot’s ideas heralded concepts that were decades later expressed by Hannah Arendt and as such, can be viewed as a voice in the discussion concerning the social determinants of individual freedom.

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