

*Giovanni Sartori: Challenging Political Science*, eds. Michal Kubát and Martin Mejstšík.

*Preface*

Giovanni Capoccia (University of Oxford)

Kubát and Mejstšík's collection brings together a series of essays on the life and work of Giovanni Sartori, written by scholars from several different generations for whom his work has served as a source of inspiration. Unlike most *Festschriften*, it accompanies the celebration of the honoree's work with broader reflections on the tensions existing between Sartori's intellectual legacy and the current state and direction of political science. In general, many political scientists would agree that the depth and the originality of Sartori's work have not found the recognition in the discipline—in particular in the US—that their rigour and originality would have warranted. Most contributions to this volume deepen and articulate this narrative while repositioning it as a "challenge" to modern political science, implicitly warning that today's political scientists forget Sartori's lessons at their peril.

This pessimistic view of Sartori's influence on contemporary political science should probably not be exaggerated: many of Sartori's writings have been translated into several languages and are still among the most cited in the discipline. A quick search on Google Scholar shows that ten of his works have citations in the thousands, and more than a further forty in the hundreds. In the US, David Collier's work at Berkeley, developing Sartori's framework for conceptual analysis, should be mentioned as one important example of how his legacy continues to be valued. Other examples of how Sartori's work has been recognized across the Atlantic, where he taught for nearly two decades, are also worth a brief mention. In 2006, the "Qualitative and Multi-Methods Research" Organized Section of the American Political Science Association organized a very well-attended Roundtable on Sartori's intellectual legacy, on which I participated together with David Collier, John Gerring, Gary Goertz and Markus Kurtz. On that occasion, the Section bestowed Sartori with its Lifetime Award, for which he expressed delight and

gratitude in his acceptance speech. Collier's and Gerring's 2009 edited volume *Concepts and Methods in Social Science. The Tradition of Giovanni Sartori* reprinted his main methodological works and complemented them with essays of younger-generation comparativists who have applied and extended his work.

Be all that as it may, it is true that, all things considered, the state of political science today does not reflect Sartori's vision for the discipline, and that the forefront of the discipline bears limited traces of his theoretical and methodological preoccupations. In his long and prolific career, Sartori certainly did not shy away from disciplinary polemics: everybody who knows his work will be acquainted with his criticisms of what he saw as unproductive directions of analysis becoming predominant in the discipline, and the neologisms ("degree-ism", "novitism", "cat-dog" are among the most memorable ones) produced by his *vis polemica* in the course of the debates that engaged him over the decades. And in spite of the above-mentioned recognition of his work, as well as other acknowledgments, which attest to his continued influence among comparativists, it is not unlikely that Sartori would use similarly colourful adjectives to describe today's general state of the discipline.

Yet, the context of the rough-and-tumble of disciplinary polemics and oft-changing academic fads may not be the best for one for assessing Sartori's overall intellectual contribution. Even though he may have lost several professional battles, many of Sartori's works --on conceptual analysis, democracy, party systems, and other themes-- continue to be read and to serve as a source of inspiration several decades after their publication. Very few authors in the social sciences are able to stand the test of time. This privilege is reserved for those publications that are rightly honoured with the epithet of "classics" of a discipline, a category to which Sartori unequivocally belongs. And even fewer authors inspire books of comments – or even criticism-- like this one, which is not the first, and will most likely not be the last, to engage with Sartori's legacy.

Of course, it is not a prerequisite to be inadequately recognized during one's lifetime (a characterization that is at any rate only partially true in Sartori's case) to later earn the status of a "classic". The history of any discipline, in the social sciences and beyond, and indeed of any intellectual field, contains examples of classic authors who were on both the winning and the losing side of the professional battles that they fought during their lifetime. In Sartori's case, however, it is probably fair to say that exactly some of the reasons that likely contributed to making his work less fashionable in the short run may be among the main causes for the durability of his intellectual work in the long run: its rootedness in long-standing traditions of philosophical and logical thought; its tackling of big, important questions that are relevant for politics and not just for academic debates; its capacity often to transcend disciplinary boundaries and narrow methodological debates to appeal to a broader audience, academic and otherwise. For these reasons, Sartori's work is likely to remain, for future generations, a source of inspiration, criticism, even imitation. Although his work will not appeal to all political scientists—indeed, it is hard to imagine any figure able to do so in the theoretically and methodologically fragmented field of political science—it will certainly endure for many comparativists, as well as for many others beyond the boundaries of our discipline.