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Stuck in Escher's staircase. Leadership, manipulation and democracy[1]

Joseph Schumpeter entwickelte eine berühmte Kritik über die klassische Demokratietheorie, wobei er die Grundhypothesen der Theorie ablehnte. Dieser Artikel will die Widersprüche erläutern, die die innere Logik der Aggregativen Theorie der Demokratie schwächen. Erstens wird erläutert, dass im Gegensatz zur Beschreibung der Wirtschaft durch die Equilibrium-Theorie in der Volkswirtschaftlehre, die Welt der Politik durch Disequilibrium gekennzeichnet ist. Es wird gezeigt, wie Multidimensionalität und Rikers Heresthetik die Rahmenbedingungen des Medianwählermodells widerlegen. Zweitens wird in Anlehnung an die Saliency-Theorie und an Susan Stokes' „Changing Calculus of Support"-Hypothese, ein neues Modell der demokratischen Konkurrenz dargestellt, welches das Problem des politischen Ungleichgewichts aufgreift und eine Alternative zum Medianwählermodell repräsentiert. Das „Changing Calculus"-Modell erklärt das Wesen politischer Prozesse und trägt damit zum Verständnis der Zusammenhänge zwischen politischer FührerInnenschaft, politischen Wissens und der politischen Situation bei. Drittens untersucht der Artikel eine wichtige, normative Folge des „Changing Calculus-Modells". Die Manipulation der Agenda und der Urteilsdimension durch politische AkteurInnen schwächt den Wirkungsmechanismus des „Friedrich's Law".

Keywords: FührerInnenschaft, Manipulation, Heresthetik, Disequilibrium, Verantwortlichkeit
leadership, manipulation, heresthetic, disequilibrium, accountability

The so-called 'elite' theory of democracy has always been entwined with the market analogy of democratic politics. In the elite theory, leaders and voters are separated, but periodically reoccurring elections ensure democratic feedback, and the elite thus remains under popular control. The concept of 'elite democracy' is, of course, an umbrella one, which brings together diverse strands which conceive the relationship between representatives and the represented, the elite and society, in somewhat different ways.

The conception that best delivers the normative aims of classical theory is the 'mandate' theory of democracy. In this conception, the representative (including the politician or party acting as such) is not an institution playing an independent role, but simply a transmission belt between the popular will and government policy. The government must implement policy which corresponds to the 'mandate' it has received; this is at once an analytical relationship and a normative requirement. Representation means the re-presentation or reflection of the popular will (Pitkin 1967); it is primarily an institutional device, essential if the ideal of popular self-government is to be realised in the context of large modern states.[2] In this mandate conception, the democratic and representative character of government lies in its responsiveness.

In the context of democratic competition, the mandate theory of democracy is best seen in Anthony Downs' theory of the median voter (1957). This conception has many merits, including

equilibrium, predictability, responsiveness and a clear definition of the common good. Its main drawback is that it rests on assumptions which are so limiting as to be of doubtful empirical relevance, and which therefore make it impossible to capture some of the most important political phenomena – such as conflict, leadership, manipulation and the restriction of competition. In the median voter model, political leaders and elites are simply embodiments of the popular will, and their role in the democratic order is thus unproblematic; there is no room for a power elite, or even an autonomous elite (Körösényi 2009).

Joseph Schumpeter (1987) offered a well-known critique of the classical theory of democracy, working from outside the theory. One of the aims of the present article is to show that there are contradictions which undermine the bases of the theory even in the internal logic of the aggregative theory of democracy. In doing so, the article makes use of William Riker's concept of heresthetic. The first part of the article presents the concept of heresthetic and considers how it contributes to an understanding of political leadership. The second part outlines a new model of democratic competition which represents an alternative to the median voter model and which reflects the problem of political disequilibrium. Beside Riker, I draw on two major empirical sources. First, I borrow the changing calculus of support hypothesis from Susan Stokes' (2001, 124) research and I try to generalize her results theoretically. Second, I will refer to the insights provided by the saliency-theory of electoral competition (Budge/Farlie 1983; Budge/Robertson/Farlie 1987). The 'changing calculus' model illuminates the nature of the political process and contributes to an understanding of the relationships between political leadership, political knowledge and the political situation. Finally, the third part of the article examines the normative implications of the 'changing calculus' model, making use of the notion of accountability.

1.   Riker's theory of political manipulation (heresthetic)

1.1 Heresthetic and the median voter model

Riker's work for a long time focused on the key problems of social choice theory, voting paradoxes and equilibrium conditions. After all, the great promise of the 1960s and 1970s was that political science could be established as a science of equilibrium, on the model of economics. Indirectly, this also promised to strengthen the academic credentials of the classical theory of democracy. However, Riker already reached sceptical conclusions on this front in his *Liberalism Against Populism* of 1982 – namely, that in contrast to the market in economic theory, politics is characterised by a *lack* of equilibrium. In the market for public goods, there is no optimal social decision; the public interest often cannot be clearly determined. Rather, the lack of true equilibrium opens the way for the manipulation of the decision-making and preference-aggregation process. Riker's attention came to centre on this type of manipulation and the role of leaders.

As was the case for Downs, Riker's starting-point was methodological individualism and social choice theory. Both scholars started from the paradigm of the aggregative – or, to use Robert Dahl's term, populist – theory of democracy. However, while Downs' median voter theory remains within this paradigm, this essay argues that Riker's theory of heresthetic breaks out of it. Even in its fundamentals, his theory diverges on several points from the median voter model's apolitical and anti-elite assumptions.

First, for Riker, the political process is characterised not by equilibrium but by disequilib-

rium. Building on social choice theory, Riker's starting point was that the aggregation of individual preferences usually does not lead to a clear determination of the common interest, as is shown clearly in the problem of cycling. Without institutional or other limitations, the amalgamation of rational individual preferences at societal level – by whatever method – does not necessarily produce equilibrium or a stable majority (Arrow 1951; Riker 1982; 1983, 47–51; Shepsle/Bonchek 1997).

Second, whereas a condition for Downs' median voter model is the restriction of the political space to a single dimension, Riker analyses the aggregation of individual preferences in a political space with two or more dimensions. In this kind of space equilibrium is rare. However, in sets of spontaneous preferences about the common good, there is no guarantee that there will only be one dimension or that preferences will be single-peaked. Cyclical majorities and multi-peaked preference sets are not confined to rare or 'extreme' political situations. The most ordinary political dilemmas, such as questions of distributive politics, often lead to cyclical majorities. This is illustrated in the literature with the 'divide-a-dollar' game, or with practical cases such as the cyclical nature of preferences about alternative income tax proposals (Shepsle/Bonchek 1997, 56–59, 91; Stiglitz 1988, 158–163). This means that the natural state of politics is disequilibrium (Riker 1980). The 'invisible hand' that Adam Smith posited for the economy is not valid for politics; the situation is precisely the opposite (cf. Olson 1965). The political world is chaotic.

It is of course true that, in practice, paradoxes of voting and the lack of equilibrium do not appear openly and produce insoluble situations, or do so only rarely. Usually, the alternatives are artificially narrowed down to a binary choice. The structuring performed by institutions – such as electoral systems – is one of the practical ways by which the narrowing-down of alternatives takes place. Alongside institutions, in Riker's work a further structuring factor plays an independent role: politicians. This is the third important way in which Riker diverges from Downs. Often, politicians' manipulation of the decision-making alternatives renders disequilibrium and cycling avoidable. From the perspective of social choice theory, leaders who seek – or achieve – electoral victory through the organised manipulation of political alternatives establish an artificial and temporary equilibrium.

It will be clear that in the social choice paradigm it is the lack of true equilibrium that opens the way for the manipulation of voter preferences and the process of preference aggregation. If there were a genuine equilibrium in the political field, there would be no need for political leaders, and the role of candidates for representative and other office would be limited to that permitted by Downs' median voter model – that is, only purely office-oriented technocrats would win elected office, mechanically following public opinion and without political ideas. However, as we have seen, because political science as a science of equilibrium does not exist, there is space for heresthetic and the art of political leadership (Riker 1986, 147).

What is meant by Riker's innovation, the concept of heresthetic? Riker considered heresthetic and manipulation in a number of his works (1983; 1986; 1996). He identified as heresthetic political actors' strategic manipulation and structuring of decision-making situations in the political process. "Heresthetic is a word (…) to describe the art of setting up situations – composing the alternatives among which political actors must choose – in such a way that even those who do not wish to do so are compelled by the structure of the situation to support the heresthetician's purpose." (Riker 1996, 9) That is, heresthetic is the art of political manipulation. The common feature of such manipulative techniques is that, with a given set of voter preferences, they may all be used to alter the result. Through heresthetic, politicians seek to structure the world – the decision-making alternatives – so as to win.

Heresthetic seeks to achieve the result without changing preferences, but simply through the structuring and manipulation of the decision-making situation. Similarly to Downs' median voter theory, heresthetic thus takes voter preferences as an exogenous factor.

1.2 Types of heresthetic

Riker distinguished five types of manipulation: 1) the introduction of new alternatives; 2) agenda-setting; 3) the manipulation of voting procedures; 4) the strategic vote; and 5) the alteration of the dimension of judgement – neither of them exists in Downs' median-voter theorem.

As regards 1), the introduction of new alternatives, this takes place with respect to an issue which is already on the political agenda. The goal is always to alter decision prospects by splitting an existing majority or creating a cycle. In this way, an unfavourable decision can be torpedoed and the *status quo* preserved. The introduction of a new alternative is an everyday phenomenon. In the case of the most common distributive issues, it is always possible to split an existing majority by introducing a new alternative (Farquharson 1969, 7–19; Riker 1983, 55–56).

Heresthetic type 2), agenda-setting, involves the introduction of a new issue. There is no objective basis for the fact that certain issues are (or should be) found at the centre of any given election campaign, nor that parties and candidates – and thus voters – formulate their positions regarding the common good in terms of one dimension (that is, one set of issues) rather than another. There is similarly no objective basis for the fact that some issues are politically more important than others. In certain cases the arrival of a new issue on the agenda can make the political space multidimensional and significantly alter the distribution of political and/or party preferences – that is, the final result. For instance, there is the familiar phenomenon of a coalition of passionate minorities, which with certain preference distributions allows minorities to defeat the majority. The well-known US Congressional phenomenon of log-rolling is built on this idea.

The manipulation of voting procedures, heresthetic type 3), is a form of heresthetic that has been known for a long time. From both social choice theory and the comparative politics literature on electoral systems it is well known that, with a given distribution of voter preferences, the final distribution of seats can vary significantly if different electoral – vote aggregation – systems are used.

In our discussion so far, it has been assumed that voters reveal their true preferences. In heresthetic type 4), the strategic vote, a false vote can often produce a result which is closer to voters' preferences than could an honest vote.

Heresthetic type 5), altering the dimension of judgement, is Riker's most interesting type of heresthetic. This involves the introduction not of a new issue or alternative but of a new viewpoint or perspective by which to judge the alternatives which exist for an existing issue, and which throws the issue and the alternatives into a new light and thereby rearranges the decision preferences. Someone who supported an option for one reason may become opposed to it once using new premises for judgement (Riker 1983, 61). Riker illustrated this method by reference to Senator Warren Magnuson's battle against the transport of nerve gas. The US Federal Government asked the Senate to approve the transfer of nerve gas from Okinawa across the state of Washington to Colorado, in the framework of an earlier agreement between Japan and the US. The Senate's approval was regarded as certain, but Senator Magnuson, from Washington State,

submitted an amendment in order to try to block the transfer. In such cases the normal approach would have been to point to local environmental and other risks, an approach which typically wins little wider support. In a surprising move, Senator Magnuson argued instead on constitutional grounds. According to Magnuson, the transfer ought to be blocked not only because of the Pentagon's abuse of the local population but also because, in the course of his agreement with Japan, the President had ignored the Senate's right to give its approval in advance. The Senate approved Magnuson's amendment (Riker 1983, 56–57; in more detail see also Riker 1986).[3] The example of Senator Magnuson illustrates the central point of this type of heresthetic: the introduction of the constitutional perspective did not simply mean the introduction of a new decision option but changed the terms in which the whole issue was judged. An environmental issue became a major constitutional question. The issue was no longer the environmental risk of the transfer but whether the President had exceeded his authority and thereby violated the Senate's constitutional rights and the fundamental constitutional principle of the separation of powers.

1.3 The nature of heresthetic

The following part of this essay analyses some characteristics of Riker's heresthetic and seeks to show how the implications of the theory undermine its initial assumptions and go beyond the boundaries of social choice theory.

As we have seen, it is the thesis of heresthetic that if in a given situation we regard the distribution of voter preferences as exogenous, political leaders may be able to manipulate the decision-making situation in such a way as to achieve in the course of the aggregation of preference a final outcome which meets their objectives. The final outcome – that is, the 'popular will' – is therefore not independent of political manipulation.

This has important consequences for political leadership. Riker's findings support the 'weaker' interpretation of Schumpeter's (1987, 263) famous thesis about manipulation: that it is possible to manipulate, if not the individual voter preferences themselves, then at least the manner of their combination and thus its result, the social decision. In this way, it is possible to create the 'popular will'.

However, even more than this follows from Riker's theory. The claim of this essay is that heresthetic indirectly also manipulates preferences and their arrangement. This is partly because the manipulation of the political agenda and the structure of decision-making alternatives affects the salience of preferences, and as a result also their content and political meaning (Riker 1983, 65; Budge/Farlie 1983; Budge 1987, 24–27). In addition, the introduction of a new dimension of judgement or the manipulation of the salience of a dimension *directly* alters preferences' political meaning (Riker 1983, 57–58). If this is correct, then for a vote-maximising politician the exogenous nature of voter preferences may not represent the kind of unchangeable 'given' that must necessarily be followed in the interests of success. The median position, as an exogenous objective 'given' for the politician, does not exist any more – that means a sharp contrast to the Downsian model. As we saw in the case of Senator Magnuson's amendment, changing the dimension of judgement may throw an issue and the relevant options into a new light and thereby achieve a rearrangement of preferences.

Heresthetic therefore ultimately involves the manipulation both of the voting alternatives and of voter preferences (Riker 1983, 65). Although it originated within the paradigm of social

choice theory, Riker's heresthetic thus ultimately undermines that theory's assumption that individual preferences are pre-existing 'givens'. Whatever arrangement of social preferences we may regard as given, in the course of their rivalry political leaders may achieve its re-arrangement through the use of the methods of manipulation discussed above. If voter preferences (or at least their political meaning) are formed by the political process itself, in political terms they can no longer be regarded as exogenous factors. This argumentation is a sharp contrast to the median-voter model in which voters preferences are exogenously specified both in the world of certainty where preferences are given in each issue-dimension and in the world of uncertainty where voter preferences are given on a single ideological Left and Right scale (Downs 1957).

Against my argument, it may be put that the techniques of Riker's heresthetic seek only to alter the context for any decision, and do not change participants' exogenous preferences (Mackie 2003; Meszerics 2008). However, there is an assumption behind this assertion which cannot be accepted – namely that voter preferences are free of context, in a political sense; or that, like preferences themselves, their context is an objective, pre-existing, exogenous 'given'. This is a reductionist picture of politics which derives from economic theory and is incorrect. For one thing, we saw in our earlier overview of manipulative techniques that there are no preferences or distributions of preferences that are objective and independent of context, but that their formation is instead affected by the agenda, the aggregation procedure, the dimension of judgement, and so forth. We also saw that if as a consequence of the reinterpretation of the political situation the salience of some voter preferences falls to nothing, the assumption about their exogenous nature collapses. The nature of the political process means that preferences become endogenous factors. We may conclude that the context will change as a consequence of the political process and its perception and interpretation. The most important question in the political battle is always: what should be regarded as a political question, and how should the political situation be understood?

The redefinition of the political situation is carried out by political leaders. The introduction of the most appropriate new alternative depends on the "invention of a new viewpoint", which requires "artistic creativity" of the highest order (Riker 1986, 1, 34). The metaphor of art has long been used to grasp the nature of political leadership and government. It expresses the fact that political activity is a creative activity; it involves the bringing into being of something which previously did not exist, just like visual or performance art (Mannheim 1991, 97–104). Its characteristics are innovation and improvisation in unique, unrepeatable situations.

2. The 'changing calculus' model and the political situation

2.1 The 'changing calculus' model

As a result of our consideration of agenda-setting, the alteration of the dimension of judgement and the introduction of new alternatives, we reached the important conclusion that even if we regard voter preferences and their arrangement as an exogenous factor, in accordance with Riker's initial assumption, their *political* meaning becomes the product of the political situation. Implicitly, Riker's analysis leads to the conclusion that the dimension in terms of which voters assess the parties and politicians competing at elections is not an exogenous given, but that it is instead formed and changed as the result of rival political actors' attempts at manipulation. The median voter model is thus unable to explain party competition and electoral behaviour not only

because of its one-dimensional nature but also because it assumes the exogenous nature of voter preferences. This article therefore argues for the use of an alternative model for the analysis of democratic competition, which is in line with the conclusions reached above and which is more able than the static median voter model to capture the dynamic of the political process. Building on the empirical research and terminology of Susan Stokes (2001, 124–129), I suggest that this alternative model be termed the 'changing calculus' model.

In contrast to the median voter model of democratic competition, the 'changing calculus' model assumes, firstly, the existence of a two – or more dimensional political space; and, secondly, a lack of equilibrium. This is not new. From the theories of Dahl (1956) and Downs (1957) we know that in a pluralist society, where a multi-dimensional political space comes into existence, there is no solid or 'objective' basis for any kind of majority and there is therefore no necessary equilibrium situation. This has two important consequences. One is that the majority is typically a coalition of minorities, which can in principle be created or brought down with several different coalitions. The second consequence is that even a homogenous majority can be defeated by a coalition of (passionate) minorities. The situation which follows from the lack of equilibrium is illuminated by the metaphor put forward by Douglas Rae, who said that a pluralist political system sets political competitors running around "one of Escher's stairways leading always up yet always coming back to its foundation" (Rae 1980; Miller 1983, 744). This is because the staircase has no summit, as there is no point of equilibrium: at every corner, the individual steps across into another (optical) dimension and toils further, downwards (or upwards).

In addition to it, the saliency theory of party competition – that evoked extensive empirical research (eg. Budge/Robertson/Hearl 1987) – also advocates some of the key problems addressed by the heresthetic model. While in the Downsian theory of competition parties offer different policies to the electorate on the *same* issue(s), the saliency theory assumes that parties compete mainly by emphasizing the importance of *different* issue(s). The competition is not about convergence (or divergence) of policies on the same issues, since the parties pass over each other and try to win votes in different dimensions (Budge/Farlie 1983, 269). The saliency theory explores patterns of competition similar to coalition of minorities situations where intensity of preferences is taken into consideration. Party competition is a struggle for agenda-setting through *selective emphases* on issues in a multidimensional policy-space, i.e. a type of agenda-setting combined with the alteration of the dimension of judgement.

All of this is connected to a third underlying assumption of the changing calculus model, namely the lack of *tertium comparationis* behind the interpretations of the political reality (Ankersmit 1996, 32, 45).[4] The multidimensionality of the ideological space undermines the comparability of policy-positions which was a precondition of the median-voting model. Recall Downs (1957, 115–116, 132) who assumes that in the world of uncertainty all issue dimensions can be weighted into a *single* ideological L-R scale. His basic model of party competition is therefore essentially one-dimensional. Behind the various policy-positions and issue dimensions it assumes a single, "objective", neutral political space. In contrast to the changing calculi model, in the Downsian world everything is comparable and commensurable; unlike on Escher's stairway, everything is seen through the *same* perspective. We may conclude that there is no cross-over from the median-voter to the changing calculi model without giving up its own assumptions.

What is new in the 'changing calculus' model? The three assumptions referred to the previous paragraph, and the features of heresthetic which were analysed in the first part of this article, have important consequences for the nature of the political process and the relationship between

leaders and voters, of which the followers of pluralist and social choice theories take no account, and the consequences of which even Riker did not fully identify. Taking these and some empirical considerations into account, table 1 shows the key features of the 'changing calculus' model.

Table 1: **The median voter and the 'changing calculus' model**

	Median voter model	**'Changing calculus' model**
Assumptions		
i) Structure of political space	One-dimensional	Multidimensional
ii) Political process	Equilibrium (predictive)	Disequilibrium (circularity)
iii) Measurement of policy positions	comparability and commensurability	incomparability and incommensurability
Features		
1) Voter preferences	Exogenous factors	Endogenous factors
2) Relationship between voters and politicians	Information symmetry	Information asymmetry
3) Main question of political competition	Who is closest to the median position?	What should be on the agenda and what should be the dimension of competition?
Main characteristic of political competition	Policy convergence	Policy divergence
4) Politicians' motivation	Office-oriented	Policy- and office-oriented
5) Leadership	Passive: leaders follow voter preferences (i.e. the median position)	Active: leaders shape the structure of alternatives; they do not regard voter preferences as exogenous; they seek support for their policy goals

First, voters' preferences constitute endogenous factors in the political process (Maravall 1999, 156), since in a political space marked by disequilibrium and multidimensionality the political meaning of these preferences can be shaped by political leaders' manipulative activities. The fact that leaders can shape the arrangement and the salience of preferences – and use the instruments of rhetoric in doing so – undermines and invalidates the assumption that voter preferences are exogenous.

Second, importantly, the 'changing calculus' model takes account of several empirical realities which are ignored by the median voter model. One is the information asymmetry between leaders and voters (Stokes 2001, 179). Elements of heresthetic, such as the changing of the dimension of judgement or the use of framing, already reflect a situation of information asymmetry. The 'changing calculus' model makes this explicit and takes account of its implications. Information asymmetry significantly expands political leaders' room for manoeuvre. A second, related, empirical reality is that voters are not only uninformed but in many political questions have no clear preference or are simply indifferent. They often take the policy proposals announced by their favourite political party. We therefore have an empirical basis for regarding public opinion and voter preferences as an endogenous factor in the political process (Jacobs/Shapiro 2000).

Third, given that the political space is multidimensional and there is no equilibrium, there

is no centripetal effect from competition between candidates that would draw the programmes of the competing candidates and parties towards the position of the median voter. In the 'changing calculus' model, the main question of political competition is, what should be on the political agenda? And, along which value or issue dimension should the battle for votes take place? Among other things, electoral competition thus comes to be about the use of campaign rhetoric which presents and emphasises an issue in such a way that voters feel the candidate's position on it is closer to theirs than is his rival's (Hammond/Humes 1995, 142), as was also highlighted in the empirical literature by the saliency-theory. Another central question of any campaign will be the phenomenon of 'framing', known from political psychology and the empirical literature – that is, whether a candidate can cause voters to see their own views in terms of the interpretative framework or dimension which is most favourable to him.

Fourth, politicians are seen as policy-oriented, which is in accordance with important empirical research results (Budge 1987, 27; Jacobs/Shapiro 2000, 16; Müller/Strom 1999; Stokes 2001). They are interested not only in office but also in political programmes. We saw earlier that the nature of political competition obliges politicians to play a more active role even if – in accordance with the assumptions of the median voter model – they are purely office-seekers. However, the 'changing calculus' model abandons this theoretically unsustainable and empirically unrealistic assumption and attributes to politicians policy preferences that are stronger and more intense than those of voters.

Fifth, in contrast to the median voter model, in the 'changing calculus' model the concept of political leadership gains independent value. Politicians are active in the political process (Blondel 1987; Blondel/Thiébault 2010; Hindmoor 2008; Poguntke/Webb 2005); voters are reactive. Politicians are not simply followers of the majority (median voter) position, but leaders who direct the political process.

2.2. The political situation, interpretation and cognition

The features discussed above underline even more strongly that in the 'changing calculus' model there is no way out of Escher's staircase. The central question in the competition between political leaders is the determination or alteration of the dimension of judgment – in other words, the interpretation of the political situation (the context). We saw that, even assuming that voter preferences are exogenous, the context affects them and their arrangement; assuming endogenous preferences may dramatically strengthen this effect.

In the 'changing calculus' model, therefore, the interpretation of the political situation has a key role. What is meant by the term 'political situation'? Here it will be useful to draw on the approach of Michael Oakeshott. According to Oakeshott, the core of political activity is to be found in the responses made to political situations. His view was that a political situation had three important characteristics or constitutive elements. "A political situation may be identified, first, as a condition of things recognized to have sprung, not from natural necessity, but from human choices or actions, and to which more than one response is possible." (Oakeshott 1991, 70) A political situation's second component is the response – that is, the decision: the situation is one to which the government or other political actors must react and in which they must take a decision. The third characteristic is the process of weighing and reflection which leads to the choice of the appropriate response to the situation. This is required precisely because in political situations there is no one necessary response.

However, the political process cannot be reduced to the triad of situation-reflection-response. The political situation cannot be regarded as an objective, *ex ante* given state, or an external factor which reflects the result of social processes, to which political actors then react. Political situations come into being as the unintended, spontaneous result of the activity of political actors with various and often incompatible objectives and ideas.

The political situation also fails to be objective in a second sense, namely that it is not a situation that presents itself as the same 'given' to everyone. The political situation is the product of reflection – that is, subjective consideration; and, moreover, the reflection 'precedes' the situation. The judgement of the situation – that is, the judgement as to whether there is a situation, and as to what it really is – is the result of the political actor's deliberation. Actors' judgements of the situation can therefore diverge, and depend to a considerable extent on their normative goals and political aspirations. The cognition, comprehension and judgement of the situation is the same as the discovery of the opportunities which it presents, which in turn takes place through the prism of normative goals and desires. The judgement of the political situation is therefore not independent of actors' wishes and goals.

As an activity which involves cognition, political leadership unavoidably includes voluntaristic elements. Political leadership is directed at action and change: to borrow Oakeshott's phrasing, it is aimed at ensuring that *what is*, is the same as *what should be*. Political leadership does not want to follow or reflect 'reality' but to change, create and manipulate. We have shown that in political terms there is no objective political reality independent of actors' goals, wishes and interpretations. If we take into account the more realistic assumptions that are closer to our empirical knowledge, we strengthen the implication of heresthetic that we outlined above – namely, that in contrast to the incorrect assumptions and normative requirements of the mandate model, politicians both want and are able to manipulate voter preferences, their arrangement and especially their political meaning. Leadership is directing and influencing the political process; announcing goals, and recruiting and mobilising supporters in the interest of achieving them – in other words, the ability to create the 'willingness to follow'. For these reasons, in the 'changing calculus' model heresthetic – manipulation – is necessarily part of political leadership. Without it, there is no solution to the disequilibrium which characterises the political world, no answer to contingent political situations and no way of reaching collective decisions. There is no democratic popular will independent of political manipulation, and no interpretation of the political situation that is independent of leaders' goals, preferences and wishes. In a contingent political situation, political leaders determine the political space(s) and dimension(s) in which voter preferences are formed and gain political meaning.

3.   Normative consequences: the decline of accountability

The phenomena discussed above are not without consequences for the processes of putting democratic mandate theory into effect and holding elected politicians to account for their performance. A political consequence of the 'changing calculus' model is a weakening of accountability and democratic control.

What happens if, after gaining office, a government diverges from the mandate it received at the elections and having 'baited and switched' as regards its election promises it changes the direction of government policy? The consequences are different in the two models. In the median voter model of democratic competition, or more broadly in the mandate theory, government

office-holders can be held to account because: a) the political situation and the dimension of competition do not change from one election to another; b) voters have stable policy preferences; and c) voters are well-informed and have no doubt about the effects of particular policies (Stokes 2001, 122). As they are well-informed and comparison is possible, voters at the next election can easily sanction the violation of the mandate and eject the government (assuming that the opposition moves closer to the median position than the government). There is thus no reason to assume that those in government would seek to violate their mandate; if anything, their interest lies in the opposite (Stokes 2001, 151–152).

In the 'changing calculus' model, both voters and politicians are operating in a different set of conditions: a) nothing guarantees that the political situation or the dimension of competition will not change from one election to another; indeed, the mechanism of competition if anything encourages such a change; b) voter preferences are endogenous factors and so can change in the period between two successive elections; and c) voters are uncertain about the effects of particular policies and see their causal effects less well than do politicians, owing to information asymmetry, but they are capable of judging their own and/or the country's situation. In such conditions, albeit not without limitations, rival political actors shape the political situation and create the dimension(s) in which voters assess the candidates (Maravall 1999, 157–158). Candidates and parties often compete in dimensions which differ between each other and between successive elections. This undermines the comparability on which rest the median voter theory and the effective sanctioning of any violation of the mandate. As a result of multidimensionality, the changeability of dimensions and the lack of comparability there is not necessarily any median position. The manipulation of the agenda and of the dimension of judgement can render impossible the sanctioning of the violation of the mandate.

How does the manipulation of the agenda and of the dimension of judgement impact on the effectiveness of Friedrich's law (1963, 199–215) – that is, the retrospective holding of the government to account for its performance? What happens if voters find that the government changes direction, compared to its election promises, and perhaps does a complete U-turn? The logic of the 'changing calculus' model does not generate an automatic or clear prediction of voters' behaviour in this scenario (Stokes 2001, 151–153): voters are uncertain as regards sanctioning the government. Adherents of accountability theory (or more broadly of the representative conception) argue that voters have good reason to be cautious about voting the government out of office if it violates its mandate. A representative government does not necessarily act appropriately by sticking rigidly to the mandate it received at elections; it does so, rather, if it governs according to voters' interests (Stokes 2001, 18; Pitkin 1967). Given that the two criteria are not at all the same a policy which violates the government's mandate may be in the public interest. In the paradigm of representative government, when they come to pass judgement on the performance of the outgoing government voters need to weigh not simply government policy but rather its effects.

We noted above that voters' uncertainty undermines accountability. In order to understand this uncertainty, let us compare the opportunities and behaviour of voters and politicians in the two models, by abandoning the three assumptions of the median voter model which we listed above one at a time, and thus adopting gradually the set of assumptions which govern the 'changing calculus' model. The first thought experiment retains the first two assumptions of the median voter model – a) the political situation and the dimension of competition are unchanged, and b) voter preferences are stable – but c) voters are uncertain about the effects of particular policies, while being able to judge whether their own/the country's situation has worsened or improved. In these conditions, voters will get rid of the government if the government's policy

switches lead to a worsening of the situation (recession, instability, and so forth), but they will support the government's policy switches if these ultimately produce favourable results. Despite their technical incompetence, voters are thus able to hold politicians to account, which in turn motivates those in office to govern responsibly. Friedrich's law works and representative government serves the public interest.

However, if we switch the second assumption so as to conform to the conditions of the 'changing calculus' model, that is, if we take account of the changeability of voters' preferences, it will be harder for those in government to anticipate the nature of the standard of judgement which voters will apply and which they will need to try to make government policy fulfil. For the effective operation of Friedrich's law, after all, one of the preconditions is that the standard by which voters will pass judgement should be predictable for the government. If it becomes unpredictable, the government's re-election comes to depend not only on the nature of its performance but also on the nature of the standard of judgement at the end of the electoral cycle. This encourages politicians seeking re-election not only to focus on their policy performance but also to establish the standard of judgement which offers the greatest prospect of their performance being judged favourably and thus of their being re-elected.

If we switch to the conditions of the 'changing calculus' model in the case of the first factor too, there comes to be no constraint on politicians' ability to establish the standard of judgement, since there is nothing to ensure that the political situation or the dimension of competition remain unchanged from one election to another. Thus, if government politicians succeed in creating for the election campaign a dimension of judgement which generates a favourable assessment of the outgoing government's policies, the government in question may be successful in the election entirely independently of its policy performance. This means that the operation of the 'changing calculus' model undermines the operation of Friedrich's law – that is, retrospective accountability for government performance.

4.   Summary and conclusions

This essay has sought to present some elements of the elitist nature of democratic competition. Starting from social choice theory and especially Riker, the article argued that, in contrast to the picture of the economy presented by equilibrium theory in economics, politics is a world of disequilibrium. The article first showed how multidimensionality and heresthetic undermine the framework of the most familiar equilibrium model in political science, the median voter theory. The article then offered an alternative framework for the analysis of political situations, democratic competition and the relationship between politicians and voters, in the shape of the 'changing calculus' model. Finally, the article briefly considered some of the new model's normative implications.

The main conclusions of the analysis were as follows:

1.   Riker's heresthetic can be used to shape not only the structure of decision-making situations but also voters' political preferences, through the manipulation of the dimension of judgement. Heresthetic thus undermines the assumption that voter preferences are exogenous.
2.   There is a key role in the political process for the manipulation of the political situation. The nature of the political situation is not natural or objective but an interpretation which

politicians create and offer to voters, and voters' preferences only gain political meaning in a political situation of this sort. Voters' preferences are endogenous factors in the political process, which are in an ongoing state of change in a continually reshaped and re-evaluated political context.

3. The median voter model cannot capture the dynamic world of political competition and the political process. The alternative which is suggested is the 'changing calculus' model, in which there is a key role for heresthetic – that is, for the interpretation of the political situation, where the interpretation is itself shaped by rival politicians.

4. Heresthetic is not simply one instrument among many for politicians, but an unavoidable and constitutive element of political leadership.

5. Heresthetic has a particularly important normative consequence for representative government and democracy. The manipulation of the agenda and the dimension of judgement undermines the operation of Friedrich's law – that is, retrospective accountability for government performance. Democratic elections do not encourage the government to try to govern in accordance with the public interest.

NOTES

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2   Dahl's work rests on this thesis (1989, 83, 97, 106, 226).
3   Riker provided many empirical examples to illustrate heresthetic (Riker 1986) and there have also been attempts at systematic empirical research (Riker 1996; Nagel 1993; 1998).
4   A crucial insight of Frank Ankersmit's (1996) aesthetic view of politics highlights this assumption of the changing calculi model.

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