

On the Flexibility of Borders between Public Reason and Collective Ignorance

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Abstract: The main theme of the paper is the issue of the foundations of social life. The author begins by outlining the tradition of the Enlightenment represented by Immanuel Kant, who attempted to justify rationally the basis of social life. Then she moves back to antiquity, to Plato, the sophists and Aristotle, to show their attitude towards the foundations of public life in order to briefly present in the following stage the original concept of Baruch Spinoza and, in more details, the views of Blaise Pascal, who is the main figure of this presentation. The final part of the paper includes a draft of the philosophical thought of postmodernism, represented by such intellectuals as Michel Foucault, Richard Rorty and Jürgen Habermas. The author additionally presents an exposition of the concept of *habitus* by Pierre Bourdieu, interpreting it accordingly to her previous reflections. The course of thought in these considerations intends to formulate a thesis which takes a stand against the most obvious opinion of Enlightenment, purporting that neither the contemporary liberal democracy nor people's respect for it and their will to obey the law are founded on reason.

Key words: reason, ignorance, liberal democracy, foundations of social life, Pascal

Słowa kluczowe: rozum, niewiedza, demokracja liberalna, podstawy życia społecznego, Pascal

Foundations of social life

Blaise Pascal says that we are as much machines, automata, as intellects; such is the origin of his thesis that argumentation cannot be the only tool of persuasion. It is insignificant how much we are capable of proving. "Proofs only convince the mind. Custom is the source of our strongest and most believed proofs. It bends the automaton, which persuades the mind without its thinking about the matter."¹ I consider this quotation – concerning the power of custom or habit – to be the best introduction to the issues of the foundations of social life, which is the subject of these considerations.

¹ See B. Pascal, *Pensées*, no. 252, transl. W.F. Trotter, Mineola, NY: Dover Publications 2003, p. 34.

I shall begin my essay with an outline of the tradition of the Enlightenment, presenting the issues raised by Immanuel Kant. Then, I will move back to antiquity, to Plato, the sophists and Aristotle in order to present, in short, the classical understanding of the foundations of public life. In the next step I will shortly expose the original concept of Baruch Spinoza and, finally, I will interpret in more detail the views of Blaise Pascal, who is the main subject of this paper. The complete presentation of the discussed issue would undoubtedly require recalling certain 'difficult' truths regarding social life expressed, for example, by the political realism of Machiavelli or by the crowd psychology of Gustav Le Bon. Unfortunately, due to the limited scope of this presentation, it is impossible to reflect on those, and other interesting theories.

The final part of my presentation includes a draft of the philosophical thought of postmodernism represented by such intellectualists as Michel Foucault, Richard Rorty, John Rawls and Jürgen Habermas. I will also interpret the concept of *habitus* by Pierre Bourdieu, adjusting its interpretation to the vein of my previous reflections. The course of thought in these considerations aims to formulate a thesis which takes a stand against the most obvious opinion of the Enlightenment, purporting that neither the contemporary liberal democracy nor people's respect for it and their will to obey the law are founded on reason.

Public reason and rational justification appear somehow *post factum*, playing a crucial role in the contemporary practice and political theory, but they are not the foundation of the social order. Hannah Arendt talks about our inability to determine the area where politics is anchored. In spite of this inability, I will try to say something about this vague terrain.

The tradition of Enlightenment

The question of the legitimacy of power, as well as the question of the rationality of the principles governing social life became an issue of the utmost importance in the period of the Enlightenment, which rejected religion, tradition, myths and legend (what we call today the disenchantment of the world) and which aimed at establishing the state and law within the framework of reason alone, most often by formulating different versions of contractarianism (Locke, Kant, Rousseau and others). Man was perceived as a rational human being who, together with other, similar human beings, is able to create a system of social and political relations by means of social agreement, acceptance and obedience of rational principles of cooperation. The discussion on the justification of social order did not focus on power, because different forms of authoritarianism and tyranny were treated as unjustified. The discussion concentrated on a specific, modern way of organizing social life, respecting human subjectivity, freedom and rationality. All

efforts aiming at the rational legitimization of any form of political power departed from the assumption that man is rational and were connected with the issue of justice – only fair and rational power may be justified and *vice versa*: only justified power may be said to be fair and rational.

One of the most eminent philosophers of the Enlightenment who attempted to justify rationally the basis of social life was Immanuel Kant. He saw in science, morality and politics signs of human rationality, allowing some hope for the future. In his *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals* he claimed that only goodwill is absolutely good². Rational human beings having good will should be able to create a fair civil society and the commonwealth of aims. In the future they should also be able to establish a worldwide project of eternal peace, conceived by means of reason. Justice, peace and worldwide fellowship of free and equal human beings are the most important signs of human rationality. Unexpectedly, however, in *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason* Kant claims that even rational man having good will may become tools in hands of evil.³ The world is immersed in evil; its essence and character are beyond understanding. There are constant disagreements among the people. It seems that the very presence of others destroys our moral predispositions.⁴

This dramatic paradox results from the fact that we are able to be rational and moral only when we are alone; among others we become irrational and evil. People corrupt one another and they are helpless over this. According to Pascal, being moral presupposes constant efforts to think. But how should we think if our reason fails us? It seemed that it is thanks to reason that we come closer to this objective. It turns out, however, that we constantly fail to achieve the aim despite being rational. This leaves us with an unsolvable *aporia*, influencing the history of modern political order.

In a more contemporary perspective, Michel Foucault emphasizes that the Enlightenment did not contribute to strengthening the power of the state. On the contrary - it undermined it. According to Leszek Kołakowski the constantly asked question about the absolutely initial situation, supposed to lay the foundations of the political power, leading to the caricature of rationality and distortion of the original myth. Paul Ricoeur points to the contemporary crisis of legitimacy of governance; he claims that the lack of justification of power influences the choice of government elected for the people and exercised by the people. Therefore he introduces a differentiation between power in common and domination.⁵ Power means the will to

² See I. Kant, *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*, ed. and transl. by Allen W. Wood, New Haven and London: Yale University Press 2002, p. 10.

³ See I. Kant, *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*, ed. and transl. by Allen Wood and George di Giovanni, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2003, p. 45-46.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 105-106.

⁵ See P. Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, transl. by Kathleen Blamey, Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press 1992, pp. 194, 256ff.

live together, which remains the forgotten source of domination. Ricoeur claims that John Rawls's fiction of social agreement serves this purpose pretty well, filling the metaphysical emptiness. Domination is explicated by reference to the primary will of common life and cooperation. The will is arbitrariness, transformed by us into anti-historic agreement, creating the potentially rational foundation for the society.

Ricoeur also points to another method of legitimizing domination and the shape of our society (suggested by, among others, late John Rawls and Jürgen Habermas), consisting in mixing in the public sphere general theories and specific historic events, combining many different cultural heritages. Its advocates suggest that the best cure for the contemporary crisis of legitimacy is constant recalling, reminiscing about different traditions of democracy, tolerance and pluralism.⁶ Domination is legitimized by recalling all the beginnings and all the 'new beginnings', as well as all traditions based on this foundation. This piece of 'good advice', rooted in the customs, tries to solve the legitimization dilemma through an appeal to common sense (*phronesis* of many), conceived as public reason visible in the will and ability to lead common life and debate. Public debate seems to be the only instrument that allows us to deter the crisis of legitimacy.

If this conclusion proves to be insufficient – which seems most likely, if we take into account the spectacular failure of communicative reason, manifesting itself in our recent history in ongoing, constant presence of triumphant and devastating unreasonable impatience, described recently by Peter Sloterdijk as “extremist rationality”⁷ – then we need to return to the roots of Western political thinking, looking there for some more fundamental answers.

The dilemmas of antiquity

It may seem strange that the most eminent scholars of antiquity avoided any attempts to reasonably account for the existing public order. Plato claims that in the non-ideal state, dexterity and supremacy are the most natural methods to exercise power. The reign of the king-philosopher and fair public order may be justified, but this justification will never appeal to the majority of people. The character of politics and the market contradict reason. The case of Socrates seems to be the perfect example. He was sentenced to death, although he lived in a rational way and during his trial he posed rational arguments.

⁶ See *ibid.*, p. 260-262.

⁷ P. Sloterdijk, “Was geschah im 20. Jahrhundert Unterwegs zu einer Kritik der extremistischen Vernunft“, in: *idem, Was geschah im 20. Jahrhundert*, Berlin: Suhrkamp Verlag 2016, p. 93-136.

The fate of Socrates should trigger some thinking among the theoreticians of politics and the politicians themselves. It is under his influence that Plato establishes his philosophical views.⁸ He does not believe that reason-based persuasion will convince everybody, because it can only be helpful in governing people of a certain cultural niveau, who are able to appreciate rational arguments. Reason-based persuasion does not help to govern the masses, believing in superstitions and indifferent to persuasion.

For Plato, sophists who believe in the force of argumentation are blind to the harshness of politics and mentality of the masses. Their attempts to identify politics with rhetoric seem to be absurd. The mistake of the sophists is not to be found in their irrational approach, but in their dangerous political naivety. This argument seems paradoxical, since Plato, known as founder of a rational philosophical system, advocate of reason and contemplation, convinces the sophists, who take a subjectivistic stance, that the masses are irrational and reason does not apply to their affairs.

Aristotle, in turn, describes public order and moral virtues as they are seen by virtuous people. He does not try to justify them, inducing their content from higher principles. He simply claims that certain habits are (considered to be) valuable. It seems that he consciously decides to keep his reflections in this domain within the limits of unwritten law. Virtues may stay in line with reason, but they are not determined by it. Law needs acknowledgement, but not justification. The same virtues sustain the existing state of course, but others (which are much more important) play a completely different role. The biggest virtue of a human being is his or her love of theoretical contemplation which, for sure, does not exist for the sake of state. The state exists for the virtue. Virtue is the aim and the state is the means that allows some of us to achieve the heights of human possibilities. In this way the state exceeds its own limits – the sense of its own existence comes from elsewhere – but it does not know where it goes. This is known only to some philosophers. Lawmakers should remember about this truth. The art of lawmaking is one of the most important and most difficult arts. It may not be narrowed to rational speculations; it is an architectural art pertaining to the whole of human life.

Faced with this astounding propensity of the classic authors of political theory, reluctantly admitting that the foundations of social and political order are to be found in such traits of human character, as dexterity, harshness and proneness to yield to supreme power – a constatation that in fact undermines belief in reason as the foundation of social life – we feel obliged to turn to the views of early modern thinkers who accept the challenge of the fact that social life and order is based on the reign of emotions, sensations

⁸ See H. Arendt, *The Promise of Politics*, ed. by Jerome Kohn, New York-Toronto: Random House 2005, p. 5f.

and imagination. The same thinkers turn out to be those who perceive in this apparently less noble foundation of order higher claims of a subtle, ecstatic reason, which – as the heart in the famous maxim of Blaise Pascal – “has its reasons of which reason knows nothing”.

Spinoza and Pascal

In this context a powerful alternative to the somehow naïve belief in reason, found in the thought of Enlightenment, presents itself in the theory of Baruch Spinoza, who should be recognized as a genuine anthropologist of democracy and the discoverer of the political multitude problem. Spinoza asked how a multitude can rule the society if the crowd is oriented only towards pictures and sensual images (*imaginaciones*), living among imaginations and being driven by the lust to possess, anger, envy, ambition and imitation rather than by rational decisions. Peter Sloterdijk states that Spinoza does not take care of all these influential flattering theories that came up later and wanted to raise the crowd to the level of reason and logical maturity.⁹ He puts forward an avant-garde postulate of a form of democratic rule based on imaginations filling the human mind. He assumes that among those imaginations one finds such that will be able to imitate reason quite well. Spinoza’s democracy is a social order that allows the crowd to be equipped with effective analogies of reason and beneficial simulations.¹⁰ Speaking of the people that are ruled by para-rational imaginations, Spinoza anticipates the problem of mass society. He does not feed us with hope that ultimately everybody will share in reason, but asks instead about the possibility to elaborate a less irrational and affected form of social life that will protect the masses against destruction. Spinoza’s theory proposes an unfeigned approach to society – life goes on and will always go on at the level of sensations and imaginations.¹¹ We only have to avoid the worst – violence and war. We should see to it that people do not harm, do not deride and condemn one another, do not be angry at their neighbors and do not envy one another, but as far as possible offer each other mutual help, following the voice of reason (which they are not able to understand).¹² This political project, dealing with human lack of reason and understanding, finds metaphysical

⁹ P. Sloterdijk, *Die Verachtung der Massen : Versuch über Kulturkämpfe in der modernen Gesellschaft*, Frankfurt am Mein: Suhrkamp 2001, p. 41

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 42

¹¹ See B. Spinoza, *Theological-Political Treatise*, ed. by Jonathan Israel, transl. by Michael Silverthorne and Jonathan Israel, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2007, Preface, § 1-9, p. 1-8.

¹² See *ibid.*, chapter 16, On the foundations of the state, on the natural and civil right of each person, and on the authority of sovereign power, p. 195-237.

ground in the wider frame of Spinoza's theory, depicting social life as the crystallization of the infinite wisdom of God.¹³

Rational absurdity of each and every public order is exposed bluntly by Blaise Pascal. What can be less reasonable than appointing the eldest son of the queen to rule the country?¹⁴ Some ridiculous rights give everything to the eldest brothers, others demand those who live on the other side of the mountain be killed. The division into mine and yours is just the beginning; Pascal confronts us with the picture of usurpation. However, before we become indignant, we should pay attention to the fact that law is simply ridiculous and unjust because the people are so and will always be. The most ridiculous laws are such due to the sensibility and madness of the people. The fact that people often turn out to be mad makes the ridiculous law suit them, helping them to become sensible, judicious and right. The power of kings is founded on the sensibility and madness of the peasantry, or even more on their own madness. "The greatest and most important thing in the world has weakness for its foundation, and this foundation is wonderfully sure; for there is nothing more sure than this, that the people will be weak".¹⁵ The rightness of appearance is stronger than reasonable arguments, and it is this rightness that makes law and order more effective, which counts most in politics.

Pascal puts emphasis on the fact that it is habit, and not reason, that constitutes human nature. What finds its ground only in reason – as e. g. respect for wisdom – has a very weak basis. Our life is directed by various different automatisms. Someone who grows accustomed to faith will eventually become a believer and nothing will be able to change her or his beliefs; someone who grows accustomed to the conviction that the king is great and powerful will always be obedient. A person needs to know her- or himself, to know who s/he is – we are as much intellects as machines. That is why people need to exercise themselves in an easier sort of faith: the one that derives from habit, the one that without any violence, without any effort, without any arguments makes us believe in something. This kind of faith makes our bodies obedient in such a way that our soul falls into it in a natural way. It is not enough to believe by means of the power of conviction, if we as machine are prone to believe in something opposite. "Both our parts must be made to believe, the mind by reasons which it is sufficient to have seen once in a lifetime, and the automaton by custom, and by not allowing it to incline to the contrary."¹⁶ It is habit that inclines the mind. The mind acts slowly, it often sleeps or is mistaken, while the machine acts quickly and infallibly. Therefore it is good to entrust that which is most important to the machine.

¹³ See *ibid.*, chapter 4, On the divine law, p. 57-67.

¹⁴ See B. Pascal, *Pensées*, no. 320, p. 41.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, no. 330, p. 42.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, no. 252, p. 34.

Differences between people become metaphysical only due to imagination, considered by Pascal to be the master of mistake and lie. Regard, reverence, fame and reputation are its products. When imagination soothes the reason, man succumbs to the eminent power of illusion: “What but this faculty of imagination dispenses reputation, awards respect and veneration to persons, works, laws, and the great? How insufficient are all the riches of the earth without her consent!”¹⁷ But Pascal thinks as well that average people have a good judgment on things, although they are permanently involved in natural lack of knowledge, turning out to be a real human condition. Departing from inborn lack of knowledge, great souls attain sometimes deep knowledge that makes them keep silent about the real basis of all things. The most troublesome to everybody are those who stopped in the middle of the route between the inborn lack of knowledge and great wisdom. They are inclined to divagate aloud into every subject matter and are stubbornly getting to the bottom of all problems; they are overconfident, half-wise men who think erroneously and confuse the world. Although the beliefs of the people are vain, erroneous, ridiculous and based on appearances, they are sound and the people are not interested in opinions expounded by philosophizing wiseacres.

The concept and understating of justice changes with time and climate, law has its own regions and epochs. Everyone believes in the justice of law in his own country – the ridicule justice, whose boundaries are determined by mountains and rivers. “[What is] truth on this side of the Pyrenees, [is] error on the other side.”¹⁸ The reason that would examine everything would simultaneously destroy everything. Some say that the source of justice is the dignity of the lawmaker; others say that it is the benefit of the sovereign, while yet more say that it is some kind of a habit. Nothing, according only to reason is just; everything changes with time. Habit begets justice only inasmuch as it is accepted; it is the secret truth of its seriousness. A person who examines the foundations of social order too deeply may quickly destroy them. Whoever wants to examine its reason will find it so trivial that everybody who is not used to seeing the miracles of human imagination will be astonished that epochs make them so serious and respected. The art of confusion and destruction of countries and societies consists in undermining the set of habits and customs by means of delving deeper and deeper to its core to expose their lack of seriousness and rightness. Denuding the foundations of order is a certain path to destroy everything – nothing will stand as just or justified. Stubborn researchers of the first cause of all approved customs and rules become their destroyers. People don’t want to know such a truth, they have to be beguiled and cheated. The people cannot consider law as usurpation; it was introduced once without

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, no. 82, p. 11.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, no. 294, p. 38.

reason but became reasonable, and it has to be instilled as authorized and eternal. Its core and beginnings should be hidden if we don't want to see its end. Justice is determined; with justice so established, our existing rights become essential and just without any deeper consideration, accepted since they exist. Similarly, as custom and fashion determines what is agreeable, so also it determines justice; this way of understanding justice is decisive for public order.¹⁹

Pascal states that people, not capable of finding justice, founded it on force and power. The laws are binding because they are enforced, kings have authority since they are mighty. People are not able to play according to the rules of justice, but they are always able to be obedient to the power and act dutifully when they yield to force. Unable to deal with justice, they decided to supplant justice by force; now force and justice are united, and their unity endows them with strength and authority. This invention makes peace possible and this peace is the most important and greatest value. The usefulness of this solution is confirmed by the words of the Bible: When a strong man, fully armed, guards his own house, his possessions are safe (see Luke 11:21). Power is the most convincing aspect for the people. The voice of the majority and the voice of tradition is important, but only inasmuch as they are the voices of power. The majority is very often wrong but has more power; traditions and customs are accepted not because they are right, but because they possess power. The power of old rights consists in the fact that they are binding due to habits and easily remove embers of discord. New things are adopted with difficulty, even if they are right. Few people are able to create something new; most people want to follow in somebody's footsteps.²⁰ Obstinate reformers show their contempt to the people by their stubbornness; the latter responds by calling them ridiculous names.

Quite often might makes use of opinion, shaping the world in this way. It does not change the essential character of the relations between people, since it is might that is the sovereign of the world, and not opinion. It is might that creates opinion. Something is beautiful according to our opinion; something is not beautiful. Why? Those who want to do something great and beautiful (for example to dance on a rope) will be alone. Someone will create a group of people who will say that what they are doing is unbecoming.²¹ Opinions change and the authority of power is lasting. The power based and built on opinion and delusion prevails for some time, but it is mild and changeable; the authority of power is everlasting and constant. Opinion is reputed to be the queen of the world, but it is power that is its tyrant. Tyranny is based on the lust to reign that is universal and beyond its scope. The strong, the fair, the sensible, the pious – everyone rules at home,

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, no. 294, p. 38; no. 309, p. 40.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, no. 302, p. 39.

²¹ *Ibid.*, no. 303, p. 39.

not elsewhere. When they meet, they fight for the universal rule, which is ridiculous, since their reign is each of a different kind. Their mistake is that they want to rule everywhere. This cannot be achieved even by the might and power, which is the mistress of external actions, but not of thoughts.²² Pascal's deliberations lead to a conclusion close to that of Hobbes: peace is achieved when each and every tyrant finds its kingdom and stays within its borders; only authority based on power and opinion is able to guarantee relatively constant peace and harmony.

Reason and unreason seem to be joined here in an intricate interplay, where reason plays the role of a concealed and apparently unnecessary faculty; whoever wants to reveal the foundations of social order by means of reason, is a noxious fool, who risks destroying what s/he tries to unravel. The borders between reason and unreason are fluid and uncertain; reasonable arguments play a certain role, but one never knows when they become dangerous and destructive. The roots of order are to remain undisclosed; as they appear to us, they are based on custom, nude force and unreason. The most important goal of social life is to maintain peace and order; in the face of this supreme objective, reason has to yield, abandoning its vain ambitions.

Civic habitus

Looking from a passage from this brilliant political thought of early modernity, balancing between reason and unreason, to more contemporary deliberations, we are definitely not without chances. Pierre Bourdieu - one of the most important contemporary French philosophers and sociologists - follows in the footsteps of Pascal's train of thought. According to him, everything finds its beginning in a final nondescriptiveness. The foundations of politics, as well as of other spheres of our culture (economy, science and art), are nondescript but imperious. Each field has its own constitution, *nomos*, conceived as an act of legislation and tautology, assuring its solid foundation: law is law, business is business, and art is art. Someone who has acknowledged the point of view appropriate for a given field cannot look at it from the outside. *Nomos* does not have antithesis. It is a thesis that cannot be denied, since it was never presented straightforwardly. *Nomos* constitutes principles that establish the field. There are various fields and different domains with their proper laws, and the powers and authorities binding within them do not see one another. Each field raises different stakes and yields different benefits. The magnitude of wealth and the greatness of thoughts are incomparable and incommensurable; businessmen, artists, athletes and officials completely engaged in their work do not even try to

²² Ibid., no. 332, p. 42.

compete with one another. Each field as a separate form of life is a place of a different cultural game, binding its participants. Each game gives us access to other aspects of reality. The point of view creates the subject matter (de Saussure) and suggests the principle of its understanding and explaining.²³

Contemporary democracy constitutes a system that is conscious of its nondescriptiveness and the fragility of its basis, of its own internal discrepancies to such an extent that it institutionalizes conflict. The final nondescriptiveness does not have the final, but the first word. Western civilization has serious reasons to place democracy first over despotism and totalitarianism. But having good reasons and being right does not mean possessing metaphysical, final foundations; it is only something that allows for liberal democracy to last and develop. Arbitrary habit – some kind of naught according to Pascal – is the final basis of each political order. Such ‘origins’ are lost in the darkness of oblivion. Amnesia can be politically saving, especially when it allows the maintenance of stability. At the beginning, lack of reason covered by myth, legend and habit is self-sufficient. The stubborn search for final foundations is a step towards a lie or hypocrisy or even worse – towards political destabilization. The truth about the origin and final basis of social and political order is not the entire truth about our political life, and possibly it is also not the truth we need the most. The ambitions of reason that wants to establish a lawful state and just country become vain. Theories of social agreement do not provide us with justification, but with a myth that founds democratic faith, given the fact that things introduced without rightness become rational and justified.

The real support of each political system is the power of habit (custom, education and automatism). We can agree that the foundation of social unity is primal harmony, but on the condition that we understand this harmony not as a conscious agreement but as a commonsensical process, producing non-reflective consensus concerning the sense of the world. This harmony (created by unconscious agreement) is prior to any openly and factually expressed will. Common sense, constituting the basis of any agreement, has, according to Bourdieu, a communal character. Citizens are actors acting on a mutual field, bound by loyalty and solidarity. In liberal democracy the existence of police and army reminds one about power as the basis of order, whilst public debates and philosophical, moral and political theories serve to “hide” (and annul) this fact. Harmony between those institutions may give the desired effects, providing stability and legitimization. Contemporary legitimate authority legitimizes itself without recourse to violence, on the grounds of sense and reason. Such an authority hardly ever and very discreetly demonstrates power, which it does not have

²³ See G. Bachelard, *The Formation of the Scientific Mind*, transl. by Mary McAllester Jones, Manchester: Clinamen Press 2002, p. 24-26.

to use and does not want to use, willingly demonstrating its understanding, justice and moral sensibility.

We can say that liberal democracy is based on its recognition as the lawful form of organization of social life, consigning to oblivion arbitrariness and power as its primary principle. Each authority desires to be respected; it does not want to be seen as an authority that has recourse to force. The use of force is particularly destructive for liberal democracy, where the issue of legitimacy is a particularly essential and sensible question. Democratic authority is appropriately legitimized by those who openly support and manifest respect to it in an open public space. Such legitimization is most effective when all benefits obtainable from supporting the authority vanish from sight. Moreover, those who profit in such a way should also be recognized as authority. The main aim of legitimization is to cover the arbitrariness, to make people forget about the power enacting laws. "Legitimation service", provided by schools, universities and the mass media, as well as by intellectuals and artists, is more efficient when they have autonomy and authority. Their independence is a condition of their symbolic effectiveness. Habermas wants to base democracy on the foundations of ethical discourse and theory of communicative action. Bourdieu thinks that the legitimization effect of this solution is small, because Habermas' complex theory is understood by only a few. On the other hand Habermas himself, as a public figure, is more convincing and influential thanks to his authority. Bourdieu also stresses the fact that art has more recipients than philosophy, and therefore it can constitute a more effective way to legitimize authority. Rulers from time immemorial strengthen their power preparing for the people peculiar performances, thus expressing the dignity of the body of societies they rule, making visible their splendour in rituals.

Pierre Bourdieu, like Michel Foucault, expresses an opinion that the power of authority impacts directly the body. The body is equipped with relations of dominance, it is an instrument of the magic of symbolic power. Bourdieu draws attention to the training that the body is subject to in different historical periods and political systems. Attitudes of subordinated persons and free human beings differ, their voice, mimicry and behaviour is different. Subservient persons are not directed by thoughts, choices or decisions, but by a certain number of automatisms, practical habits that can emerge as a result of a long lasting training. Crucial for the permanence and stability of political systems is its capacity to teach their subjects to respect authority and to adhere to law. In liberal democracies the situation is particularly difficult, since they are all about forming and shaping the entire chain of complex skills and virtues. They can be generally described as the ability to be a rational, free, conscientious and prudent person, who keeps her or his promises and acts in accordance with the accepted principles. Liberal democracy is based on complex habits, such as the habit to discuss, the usage of justification, the habit of respecting others, tolerance

for differences, the ability to conclude agreements and their fulfilling, the sense of justice and the will to be a just man or woman. Such habits can be acquired only by means of the common influence of many different institutions that work on instilling in all citizens similar principles of thinking and acting, bending their conduct according to the rules of cognitive, social and moral conformism. Only in this way can societies reach a precontemplative consensus concerning the sense and meaning of the world. Instilled principles and convictions constitute the basis of the common everyday reality. The social order they create presents itself as necessary, natural and comprehensible, as the ongoing, astounding miracle of obviousness, lawfulness and harmony.

Therefore, the civic *habitus* constitutes the base of stability of the public order – the set of skills and abilities obtained by living in a particular society, passed in families, schools, enforced by authorities and numerous institutions at their disposal.²⁴ This *habitus* consists in an ability to move in an open public space and to behave appropriately in various public situations; to feel the game, to possess only the partially realized and principally unpresentable knowledge of what should be said and in what way to react.²⁵ Such a *habitus* makes us competent members of a particular community, citizens of a contemporary state. *Habitus* means predisposition, an element of our practical sense and not of a rational calculation; it is an experience of a player, subtle tact, intuition, developed taste, good taste. Bourdieu says that *habitus* is a method in which the past (not only our own, but first of all of our country and culture) is always present and alive in us; it is a foundation of silent agreement between the actors, who are the products of the same conditions and similar experiences. A society consists of spontaneously coordinated *habitués*. Each of its representatives (actor) confirms and legitimizes his or her views and behaviours, as well as views and behaviours of the entire group. Thanks to their *habitués* members of a particular society have the feeling that they are in their own place. None of the actors chooses the principles of his or her own choice, none of them chooses his or her own *habitus*. Constructive patterns that are applied to the world are given to him or her from outside, as determined by an unbiased world. Thanks to interiorization of some rights and principles individual history meets with collective history, mechanisms and structures existing in the open public space meet with individual mentalities. *Habitus*, product of history and society, enables us to acquire the knowledge of history and to participate in social life. The body moves in social world and social world is present in the body. History communicates with itself and reflects in itself. In this process appears the effect of total and direct adjustment. Perfectly adjusted individuals are ready to meet with the well-known world. They

²⁴ See. A. Elliott, *Contemporary Social Theory*, Routledge 2009, p. 145-148.

²⁵ See. P. Bourdieu, L. J. D. Wacquant, *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology*, Cambridge-Oxford: Polity Press 1992, p.115-120.

are self-confident, have a sense of their own identity and bonds with others. Our *habitus* comprises a set of correct answers to all the important questions, infallible judgment, language competences – a set of clear, precise and understandable statements and rules.

No one can be persuaded into a specified practice by means of argumentation; there are also no truths free from context in which they have been acquired. As we learn from Leszek Kołakowski, human beings cannot initiate anything from the beginning, departing from a pre-human starting point.²⁶ Man is always the immovable point of final departure for himself. The participants of a particular game share a particular common *illusio* that is never a mere set of illusions, but a necessary faith in the sense of the game itself. For a person who is engaged in the game, the game becomes the universe, outside of which nothing makes sense. The game imposes its rules, aims and norms. But its sense and meaning is a work of a practical project. Automatic mechanisms shape the motives of players, they are the original basis of the game; they dictate actions and views to the unconscious, endowing it with their proper tools of thinking. With great effort, reflection is able to reveal some mechanisms and tools of thinking and acting, but it cannot release neither thinking nor acting from their compulsive influence.

Memory and oblivion

The foundation of liberal democracy can thus be described as the culture of citizens equipped with virtues – civic *habitus* – and sharing common *illusio*. This civic culture distinguishes itself through the lack of practical ability to live in conditions of despotism, by the total oblivion of how it is to be subdued, subjected to oppression, enslaved, supervised, humiliated but also how it is to be a tyrant, enslaving others. Cultural citizens of contemporary liberal democracies forgot about the arbitrariness of social and political order in which they are living, they forgot about its difficult beginnings, as well as about how it is to eagerly desire a final settlement of political life on some kind of broad religious or philosophical doctrine (Rawls) in some kind of meta narration (Foucault). These citizens live without any universal claims, but also do not fall into cynical nihilism. Rorty particularly recommends this kind of oblivion – claiming that remedy for our political problems does not consist in referring to validated philosophical or theological theories but in neglecting them benignly.²⁷

²⁶ See L. Kołakowski, *The Presence of Myth*, transl. by Adam Czerniawski, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press 2001, p. 12-13.

²⁷ See R. Rorty, „The Priority of Democracy to Philosophy”, in: Merrill D. Peterson, Robert C. Vaughlin, *The Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1988, p. 262.

The intuition that liberal democracy is rooted in predispositions (*habitus*) of citizens is present in the works of numerous authors. Rawls says that the predisposition of citizens to perceive themselves as ideal lawmakers, rejecting those national officials and candidates for public offices who breach principles of public reason (if frank and popularized) becomes one of the political and social roots of democracy and is necessary for maintenance of power and life. The habit to obey the law, the sense of justice, the awareness of political issues, make up cornerstones of civic political culture and the best foundations of liberal democracy.²⁸

The legal validity of liberal democracy is based on political culture of citizens whose mentality was formed and shaped by the entire tradition of the West. Cultural, well-educated, rightful members of liberal society have an appropriate sense of politics. They are equipped with proper *habitus*, deciding about their fundamental choices. The way they live and act, as well as the way they use their language, the way they understand certain attitudes and concepts (such as freedom, equality, justice, respect for a human being etc.) has a significant meaning for their political decisions.²⁹ The entire process of upbringing and education, all the read books, watched films, listened concerts, as well as all ideas about good manners and the concept of being a trustworthy, honest man or woman constitute the core of their loyalty to liberal and democratic social order. Some issues are settled even before citizens begin to debate together and find justification, before they begin to use public reason. We may say that citizens of liberal democracy suffer from collective amnesia – they do not remember about the violent beginnings of countries and societies; they do not want to return to these questions, they prefer to remain silent about some issues in order to avoid unnecessary conflicts. Due to that they are sometimes accused of weakness, cowardice and lack of character. Their attitude, however, has nothing to do with hypocrisy. They are simply someone else than their brutal ancestors, their culture became their “nature”. It is not a deception or a lie. Loyal amnesia does not consist in removing from memory all the terrible facts (that would be too dangerous in political sense), but it consists in unwillingness and lack of ability to live in a certain way (there are things we are aware of and which permanently threaten us with terror and outrage, there are situations in which we do not want find ourselves, and there are ways we would not be able to handle). The basic political choice (rejection of violence, broad-mindedness, desire of freedom, tolerance, striving towards self-realization in one’s own unique way) is an issue constitutive of the civic identity, defining citizens who feel as liberals and want to behave in a way appropriate for members of the contemporary society.

²⁸ See J. Rawls, *Political Liberalism: Expanded Edition*, New York: Columbia University Press 2005, pp. 122-123 and 190-195.

²⁹ See S. Macedo, *Liberal Virtues. Citizenship. Virtue and Community in Liberal Constitutionalism*, Oxford: Clarendon Press 1990, p. 222-225.

Language in which one can grasp this concealed truth about liberal democracy, so difficult to reveal, is the language of aesthetics rather than metaphysics. Liberal democracy is based on the culture of citizens who are equipped with appropriate *habitus* and their most fundamental choices and decisions are the issue of sense and taste. This intuition is accurately expressed in Zbigniew Herbert's poem "Potęga smaku" ("The Power of Taste"). It seems that in politics many things are and will stay the question of taste – therefore aesthetics is not to be neglected, when it comes to finding the proper shape and form of social life.³⁰

Equivocal role of philosophy

The reasonable foundations of social order, once believed to be clear and evident, appear today to be most uncertain and opaque. Hans-Georg Gadamer expressed this overwhelming practical opacity of reason, stating in an interview after the events of September 11, 2001: "Es ist mir recht unheimlich geworden"³¹ – I definitely felt like not at home. Reason seems to lose ground in social and political life – if it ever had it.

How can the role of philosophy then be specified in a postmodern liberal and democratic society? Philosophy has been released from the function of providing inviolable foundations of political life and culture; it still plays, however, an important though ambiguous role – it strengthens our confidence in reason, at the same time making us aware of our irrationality. According to scholars such as Rawls and Habermas, it convinces us that reason is our true nature, that following reasonable principles is the best path we can follow; that a return to barbarities is unthinkable. It makes us sensitive to our irrationality, since – as such philosophers as Foucault or Mouffe propound – it tries to protect us against politically dangerous naivety, revives the memory of our inborn brutality, convinces us that the liberal rights and institutions are a fragile product of the last few decades and can be easily destroyed, that a return to barbarity can happen to us at any moment. Philosophy has to respond to two opposing and inalienable needs – the need to maintain the myth, drawing on the controllable irrational, and the need to understand. No philosophy will be able to protect public order, if people of wrong taste and weak reason predominate among citizens. One can hope, however, that – following Kant's words – even if liberal constitutional democracy is not worth much in theory, it quite often turns out to be right in practice.

³⁰ "Potęga smaku"/„The Power of Taste”, transl. by John and Bogdana Carpenter, in: Z. Herbert, *Selected Poetry*, Wydawnictwo Literackie, Kraków 2000, p. 144-147.

³¹ Hans-Georg Gadamer, „Es ist mir recht unheimlich geworden”. Interview, *Die Welt*, 25.09.2001, <https://www.welt.de/print-welt/article477725/Es-ist-mir-recht-unheimlich-ge-warden.html>

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