

Magdalena ŻARDECKA-NOWAK<sup>1</sup>

## **PHILOSOPHY AND CIVIC HABITUS IN POSTINDUSTRIAL SOCIETY**

The paper concerns our contemporary democracy which constitutes a system that is conscious of its non-descriptiveness, fragility of its basis and its internal discrepancies to such an extent that it institutionalizes conflicts. The non-descriptiveness does not constitute the final word of our social order but the first one. I argue that people from the West have serious reasons to put democracy first over despotism and totalitarianism. Having such right is not equal to having knowledge of the final metaphysical foundation. Our opinions and arguments are not the fundament of our society, because no one can be persuaded to a specified practice by means of argumentation. A real support of each political system is the power of habits, customs and many kinds of social automatisms. Our habits are the final and the most important basis of our political order. Such 'origins' are dying in the darkness of oblivion. We are not aware of them and we think of them as obvious and natural. On the one hand, philosophy helps us to understand that our habits and social virtues allow for maintaining our social and political stability, but on the other hand philosophy, making us aware of all social and political controversies, may lead to dangerous political destabilization. I will try to discuss this difficult issue in more details.

**Keywords:** authoritarianism, democracy, Pierre Bourdieu.

### **1. CIVIC HABITUS**

Pierre Bourdieu - one of the most important contemporary French philosophers and sociologists - is the continuator of the Pascal's way of thinking<sup>2</sup>. According to him, everything finds its beginning in a final non-descriptiveness. Foundations of politics and other spheres (fields) of our culture (like economy, science and art) are nondescript but imperious. Each field has its own constitution – *nomos* – the act of legislation and tautology as the solid foundation: law is law, business is business, art is art<sup>3</sup>. Having acknowledged the point of view appropriate for the field one 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 straight forward. *Nomos* constitutes principles that establish the field.

There are various fields and different laws and the powers and authorities binding within them do not see one another. There are different benefits constructed by each field. The magnitude of wealth and the greatness of thoughts are not compatible; a businessman, artist, athlete and official completely engaged in their work do not even try to compete with one another. Each field as a separate form of life is a place of different cultural games (linguistic games). Each game gives the access to other aspects of reality. The point

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<sup>1</sup> Prof. Magdalena Zardecka-Nowak, Institute of Sociology, University of Rzeszow

<sup>2</sup> See P. Bourdieu, *Medytacje pascalijskie*, transl. K. Wakar, Oficyna Naukowa, Warszawa 2006.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 138.

of view creates the subject matter and suggests the principle of its understanding and explaining<sup>4</sup>.

The contemporary democracy constitutes a system that is conscious of its non-descriptiveness and fragility of its basis and its internal discrepancies to such an extent that it institutionalizes conflicts. However the non-descriptiveness does not constitute the final word but the first one. People from the West have serious economical, ethical, practical, psychological etc. reasons to put democracy first over despotism and totalitarianism. Having such opinions and rightness is not equal to having knowledge of the final metaphysical foundation. Neither metaphysical theory nor logical and scientific arguments are the fundament of our society, because no one can be persuaded to a specified practice by means of argumentation.

Bourdieu says that the real support of each political system is the power of habits, customs and automatisms. Our habits are the final basis of our political order. Such 'origins' are dying in the darkness of oblivion. We are not aware of them. We think of them as obvious and natural. Our habits which allow for maintaining our social and political stability are called virtues and these virtues are self-sufficient.

Bourdieu says that the foundation of social unity is 'primal harmony'. He understands it not as a conscious rational agreement but as a common sense (practice sense) with non-reflective consensus concerning the sense of our society and politics<sup>5</sup>. This harmony is prior to any openly and factually expressed will and opinion. Common sense constituting the basis of any agreement has national and social character. Citizens are the actors acting in a field bounded by their mutual loyalty and solidarity. It can be said that liberal democracy is based on their common recognition as the lawful and legal form of social life. Citizens' good habits build their trust to liberal democracy and gives to it the power to last and develop<sup>6</sup>.

Bourdieu like Foucault expresses an opinion that the power of authority impacts directly the body. The body is equipped with social order. This is the magic of symbolic power. Upbringing, education and many other kinds of systematic, long lasting trainings shape our bodies, voices, mimicry and behavior. A well educated, having good manners person is not directed by a thought, choice or decision but by a number of automatisms and practical skills.

The most important issue for permanence and stability of the political system is to teach people to respect authority and law. In liberal democracy the situation is particularly difficult because it is all about forming and shaping the entire chain of complex skills, virtues and habits. One can distinguish among them the ability:

- to be rational,
- to be free,
- to be prudent,
- to keep ones promises,
- to act in accordance with the accepted principles,
- to respect other people (not despise),
- to discuss about difficult issues (not quarrel),

<sup>4</sup> See G. Bachelard, *Kształtowanie się umysłu naukowego*, transl. D. Leszczyński, Słowo-Obraz-Terytoria, Gdańsk 2002.

<sup>5</sup> See P. Bourdieu, *Zmysł praktyczny*, transl. M. Falski, Wydawnictwo UJ, Kraków 2008.

<sup>6</sup> See P. Bourdieu, *Rozum praktyczny*, transl. J. Stryjczyk, Wydawnictwo UJ, Kraków 2009.

to justify an opinion or decision,  
 to tolerate differences,  
 to be reliable,  
 to be trustworthy,  
 to have the feeling of justice,  
 to have the will to be a just man/woman.  
 to move in an open public space and behave in various public situations,  
 to feel the political game,  
 to have not fully aware and impossible to be presented knowledge of what should be said and in what way to react<sup>7</sup>.

It is possible to create such civic habits only during long-lasting training and owing to cooperation and common influence of many different social and political institutions like: families, schools, universities, judiciary, army, police etc. Those institutions work together on instilling in all the citizens similar principles of thinking and acting. This huge work conducts to cognitive, social and moral agreement. Only in this way precontemplative consensus concerning the sense of our world and the understanding of justice can be reached.

Instilled principles and convictions constitute the basis of social order. Owing to them the social order that is found presents itself as necessary, natural, comprehensible and just. It is the miracle of obviousness, lawfulness and harmony. Such a *habitus* makes us competent members of a particular community, the citizens of a contemporary state. *Habitus* means a predisposition, an element of our practical sense (not 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 of our own but mainly of our country and our culture - is always present and alive in us. It is a basis of silent agreement between the actors that are the products of the same conditions and similar experiences.

## 2. SOCIAL STABILITY

A society consists of spontaneously coordinated *habitués*. Each of its representatives (actors) confirms and entitles the group's views and behavior. It causes that members of a particular society have the feeling that they are in their own place. None of the actors chooses the principles of his/her own choice; he/she does not choose his/her own *habitus*. Constructive patterns that are used towards world are given to him/her from the outside as determined by an 'unbiased world'. Owing to interiorization of some rights and principles an individual history meets with a collective history (mechanisms and structures in the open public space and in individual mentality meet each other). *Habitus*, which is the product of history and society, allows for acquiring the knowledge of history and the participation in social life. The body moves in a social world and the social world is present in the body. The history communicates with itself and reflects in itself. The effect of total and direct adjustment appears when such a thing occurs.

Perfectly adjusted individuals are ready to meet with the well-known world. They are self-confident, they have integrated feelings of their individual identity and they

<sup>7</sup> See. P. Bourdieu, *Zaproszenie do socjologii refleksyjnej*, transl. A. Sawisz, Oficyna Naukowa, Warszawa 2001, pp.100-105.

understand each other. Well-adjusted individuals know correct answers to all the important questions, they have an infallible judgment, perfect language competence (clear, precise and understandable statements).

In liberal democracy the existence of police and army reminds about the power as the basis of order whilst public debates and philosophical, moral and political theories serve to hide and revoke this fact. Harmony between those institutions may give a decent effect in the form of stability and entitlement. Entitled authority shows itself as legal without violence on the ground of sense and reason. Such an authority hardly ever and very discreetly demonstrates power which it does not have to use and does not want to use while it willingly demonstrates its understanding, justice and moral sensitivity. The authority of power, law and state let us forget completely about arbitrariness as the primary principle. Each authority desires to be respected; it does not want to be an authority that is employing force. Using force is particularly destructive for liberal democracy therefore, the issue of sensible entitlement is so essential here.

The authority of government is appropriately entitled by those who openly support and manifest respect to it in an open public space. The greatest effect of entitlement is born when each and every benefit that somebody would obtain by supporting the government disappears from the field of vision. "Entitling service" is dependent with a "symbolic effectiveness" and it is more efficient when supporting authorities have autonomy.

Art has more recipients than philosophy therefore, it can constitute a more effective way to entitle the authority of government. The authority since old days uses arts' power preparing for society performances and rituals to show its dignity.

### 3. CULTURE MEANS MEMORY AND OBLIVION

The foundation of liberal democracy is the culture of citizens equipped with virtues – civic *habitus* – and sharing common sense called by Bourdieu common *illusio*. The culture of citizens presents long chain of abilities and skills. Besides them it presents entire lack of some practical abilities. The citizens of our contemporary democratic and liberal society have to forget how it is to live in conditions of despotism, how it is to be a subordinate to oppression, how it is to be enslaved, supervised, humiliated etc. They have to forget also how it is to be a tyrant to others. Cultural citizens of contemporary liberal democracy do not remember about arbitrariness of social and political order in which they are living; they have forgotten about its difficult beginnings. They have also forgotten about the fact how it is to desire eagerly final settlement of political life. They don't need any kind of wide (religious or philosophical) doctrine (Rawls), any kind of meta-narration (Foucault) to justify political order. 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 constitute referring to validated philosophical or theological theory but forgetting about them kindly<sup>8</sup>.

An intuition that liberal democracy is rooted in predispositions (*habitués*) of citizens is presented in many authors' works. Rawls says that the predisposition of citizens to perceive themselves as ideal lawmakers rejecting those candidates for public offices who breach principles of public reason, and it becomes one of the political and social 'roots' of

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<sup>8</sup> See R. Rorty, *Pierwszeństwo demokracji wobec filozofii* w idem, *Obiektywność, relatywizm i prawda*, transl. J. Margański, Warszawa 1999, p. 268.

democracy. Good habits, skills and automatisms comprise political culture of citizens and are the best foundations of liberal democracy<sup>9</sup>.

Legal validity of liberal democracy is based on political culture of citizens whose mentality was shaped by the whole tradition of the West. Cultural, well-educated, rightful members of liberal society have appropriate sense of politics. They are equipped with *habitus* which decides about their fundamental choices. The way they live and act, as well as the way they use their language, the way they understand some motions and concepts (such as freedom, equality, justice, respect for a human being etc.) has a significant meaning for their political decisions<sup>10</sup>. 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/woman constitute the core of their loyalty to liberal and democratic social order.

Some issues become settled down even before the citizens commence to debate together and find justification, as well as before they will start to use public reason. It can be said that citizens of liberal democracy suffer from collective amnesia – they do not remember about the beginnings (full of violence) of countries and societies, and they do not want to return to that; they prefer to remain silent about some issues in order not to cause unnecessary conflicts. Due to that they are sometimes accused of weakness, cowardice and lack of character. Their attitude has nothing to do with them. They are simply someone else than their brutal ancestors, their culture became their “nature”. It is not a deception, hypocrisy or lie.

However, loyal amnesia does not consist in removing all the terrible facts from memory because it would be too dangerous in political sense. Loyal amnesia 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, there are situations in which we do not want to be and we would not be able to handle them. The basic political choice (rejection of violence, broad-mindedness, the desire of freedom, tolerance, driving at self-realization in a unique way) is an issue of the citizens' identity who feel as liberals and want to behave in a way appropriate for members of the contemporary society.

The language in which one can grasp this difficult to be revealed truth about liberal democracy constitutes the language of esthetics 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 the poem by Zbigniew Herbert “*Potęga smaku*” [*The Power of Taste*]. It seems that in politics many things are and will stay the issue of taste – therefore esthetics can be helpful in life/one cannot neglect the learning about beauty (transl. – MZ)<sup>11</sup>.

#### 4. THE ROLE OF PHILOSOPHY

If you are a good (virtuous, righteous) man/woman, you have nothing to do with dark side of human nature. If you are a politic, you have to take care of peace and social order. But what should you do if you are a philosopher? How can the role of philosophy be specified in the post modern liberal and democratic society?

<sup>9</sup> See J. Rawls, *Liberalizm polityczny*, transl. A. Romaniuk, Warszawa 1998, pp. 182-183, 265-272.

<sup>10</sup> See S. Macedo, *Cnoty liberalne*, transl. G. Łuczkiwicz, Kraków 1995.

<sup>11</sup> See Z. Herbert, *Wiersze zebrane*, Wydawnictwo a5, Kraków 2008, p. 523.

Philosophy was released from the function of providing inviolable foundation of culture and political life. But it still plays an important role in our European intellectual and political life. It serves our awareness and our memory, and it serves our oblivion as well. Philosophy makes us aware of our situation when - owing to such thinkers like Bourdieu - it opens our eyes for our cultural, moral, philosophical and social presuppositions, preconceptions and assumptions. It always tells us: 'Don't sleep! Be aware!' Philosophy helps us to avoid some intellectual mistakes and moral sins like: naivety, arrogance, hypocrisy, cynicism. It makes us aware of how difficult it is to achieve any social order. I help us to be careful, to give some serious attention to our social and moral rules, to act gingerly, with great care and caution, to avoid causing harm or making a big noise in public sphere.

Philosophy also serves our oblivion when - owing to scholars such as Rawls and Habermas - it convinces us that reason is our nature; that following reasonable principles is the best way we can do; that the comeback to barbarities is impossible for us; that our culture is our nature. It says: 'Don't remember, forget forever about violence and cruelty'. But in the same moment it serves our memory when - owing to such philosophers as Foucault or Finkelkraut - it wants to protect us against politically dangerous naivety; it condemns our hypocrisy and falseness; it revives the memory of our inborn brutality; it makes us aware that the liberal rights and institutions are the fragile product of several last decades and can be easily destroyed and the return to barbarity can happen to us at any moment. Contemporary philosophy teaches us about some sad and difficult truths which shouldn't be expressed loudly. Philosophy, from ancient times to nowadays, has made big efforts to give an answer to opposing and impossible to be removed human needs - the need to maintain the hope for future and the need to understand the past.

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### FILOZOFIA I CIVIC HABITUS W SPOŁECZEŃSTWIE POSTINDUSTRIALNYM

Artykuł dotyczy współczesnej demokracji, która ukazana zostaje jako systemem do tego stopnia świadomy swej niezdolności do samoopisania, kruchości swych podstaw oraz wewnętrznych rozbieżności, że instytucjonalizuje konflikt. Niezdolność do pełnego opisanego i wyjaśnienia samej siebie nie jest kresem lecz początkiem naszego społecznego porządku. Argumentuję, że ludzie Zachodu mają poważne powody by przedkładać demokrację ponad despotyzm i totalitaryzm. Posiadanie takich powodów nie jest jednak równoznaczne z posiadaniem wiedzy na temat ostatecznych metafizycznych fundamentów demokracji. Nasze przekonania i argumenty nie są podstawą naszego społeczeństwa – nikt nie może zostać przekonany do żadnej praktyki za pomocą siły argumentów. Rzeczywistym oparciem dla każdego politycznego porządku jest potęga zwyczajów oraz niezliczonych społecznych automatyzmów. Zwyczaje są ostateczną i najważniejszą podstawą politycznego porządku. Te „podstawy” toną w ciemności i zapomnieniu. Nie jesteśmy ich świadomi, traktujemy je jako oczywiste i naturalne. Filozofia z jednej strony może pomagać zrozumieć, że nasze zwyczaje i społeczne sprawności pomagają nam podtrzymać społeczną i polityczną stabilność, z drugiej strony zaś – czyniąc nas świadomymi społecznych i politycznych kontrowersji – może prowadzić nas do politycznej destabilizacji. Właśnie ten trudny problem spróbuję w niniejszym artykule rozważyć.

**Słowa kluczowe:** autorytaryzm, demokracja, Pierre Bourdieu.

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