

DEFINING DEMOCRACY PRAGMATICALLY AND WITH POLAND IN THE BACKGROUND

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Summary. The purpose of this article is first of all to define democracy in comparison with the Polish experience. The text consists of five parts. Part one deals with political ontology. Part two contains a preliminary definition of the pragmatic understanding of democracy, contrasted with the republican standpoint. Part three is a sketch for the picture of Polish society after the so-called political-system transformation and its effects in the form of division into beneficiaries and victims of these transformations. It also describes the brutalization of public language in Poland after 1989. Part four discusses the mental/cultural condition of people subjected to transformation processes, their responses to the changes, and the social projects characteristic of them, which would satisfy the criteria for a pragmatic definition of democracy. Part five deals with democracy as social practice or a culturally determined process, developed in a specific time and place, animated by dispute (culture of dispute).

Key words: pragmatic definition of democracy, republicanism, political ontology, political-system transformation, post-Solidarity society

INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

In the present paper I shall seek (or should I say dare) to define democracy in comparison with the Polish experience in this field. The construction of the subject is a risky one. The main difficulty in carrying it out is that we should avoid confusing research pragmatics: the scopes of competences of a political journalist and a political philosopher. I expect the former to describe events and comment upon them, the latter – to make an in-depth analysis using the concepts he himself can coin for the purpose. I would like to combine the two goals to some extent: to establish the meaning (carry out a semantic analysis) of the concept of democracy and compare it with the specific socio-political reality that we know from the media and everyday experience. When talking about politics in a philosophical or journalistic (i.e. more colloquial) way, however, we encounter the same problem: in either case we have to use language which itself contains culturally defined representations/ways of presenting politics. In my discussion I shall

therefore be guided by the precept (well-known in the humanities from the so-called linguistic turn) according to which the way we talk about the world and present it structures the way we perceive it. This means, in other words, that we never have direct access to the world. Consequently, there is no such thing as political *reality in itself*, or democracy *in itself*, concealed under the layer of its descriptions.

If this is really the case, if understanding politics is not a matter of *objective facts* but rather of languages, conventions, styles of representing it, then we can justifiably ask what kind of criteria we should use to measure the accuracy/veracity of also our understanding of democracy/common good, and along with it, our duties towards and relations with the community? Who understands more/better and who less/worse – and what should it depend on? The point is if there is no one true answer to these questions. Doomed to speak (speech is our *abode*, as some say) we are also doomed to use language with the vision of the world residing in it (the system of values and institutions implementing them), or with a specific ontology. Which is why we never create either the world or ourselves from the beginning, just as we do not make political identities. The way we regard a community, the fact of being Polish, a patriot etc. – whether as something natural or artificial (a construction) – will ultimately determine our understanding of democracy. We think these concepts to be commonsensically comprehensible. If, however, there was something like one universal common sense, then why should we argue over something as obvious as for example the concept of community? After all, it denotes a group of people, in which each of us is born and grows up, without which we cannot cope individually, because it provides each of us with a certain source context – a basis for comparison, which determines our identity, allows us to contact one another, be distinct from others by similarities in finding our way around in life, in evaluating things, in selecting our ends and means of their implementation. If this should be so obvious, then where do these disputes in theory and in practice – in science and politics – between the communitarians and liberals, the right and the left come from? From the fact, the answer goes, that the category of common sense is also a mere cultural construct and nothing more.

A pragmatic approach to democracy is the guiding thread of this presentation. It is not free from ontology, nevertheless, its attractiveness, from the adopted point of view, lies in its minimalism it is able to satisfy that which I regard as the basic measure for assessing the efficacy of the democratic state. In my terminology they are *freedom indicators*. They can also be efficiently used to explain the key problems of Polish society under the conditions of freedom: split and torn by divisions that contradict the ideals of solidarity.

The presentation consists of five parts. Part one is devoted to ontological problems. In part two I begin to specify the pragmatic approach to democracy, comparing it first with the republican standpoint. Part three is a sketch for the picture of Polish society: it deals with the political system transformation and its effects which are the divisions into beneficiaries and victims of the transforma-

tions. The significance and scale of these divisions is additionally illustrated with a description of brutalization of public discourse, which took part in Poland after 1989: it documents mutual intolerance and contempt for those who think differently. Part four is concerned with the condition of the people in the process of social and cultural changes who compensate for their mental/cultural strains by means of nationalist ideologies but also by other types of reactive behaviors, who choose to live a comfortable life of cosmopolitan consumers or, frustrated, leave their country *for bread* (i.e. to earn a decent living). This section also establishes that a pragmatic definition of democracy is associated with social projects selected by esthetic criteria (postulates regulating social life) rather than by cognitive ones (ideas constitutive of this life). The final Part five discusses democracy as a social practice or a culturally determined process, developed in a particular time and place, animated by dispute (the culture of dispute) and therefore capable of combining in it the organizations of individuals, organized in an egalitarian and at the same time hierarchical way.

THREE ONTOLOGIES

How is it with us: are we assigned once and for all to the community where we grew up, or not – we can free ourselves from it completely and move to another one? Can we freely construct a new one that did not exist previously? The answers to these kinds of questions depend on the settlement of a more fundamental issue: what are political identities and how do they arise? We are therefore dealing with ontological problems related to our existence in the social and political worlds and to the identities of these worlds – the people that inhabit them and institutions. The basic question is to what extent these are moving identities, i.e. they belong to the area of social fiction, they are *social constructs*, and to what extent they are *natural*? The settlement of this question has an impact not only on understanding the phenomena of community and democracy we are discussing here but, in general, also on the rest of the remaining problems of philosophy of politics, especially on the questions of state, law, and authority. In most general terms, three standpoints on the issue can be distinguished.

The first, oldest and classical one: political identities such as state or citizen are *natural* formations. Metaphysically, i.e. in the order of perfection of being, that which is logical being, understood as *ens rationale*, or its abstract attributes, immanent in reason in the sense of being subordinate to first principles (non-contradiction, the excluded middle), is hidden – as essence, substance, form – under the surface of that which is variable and not necessary, it takes precedence over the latter, it outweighs it in importance. Both individual human beings and whole societies and nature in general have the same structure. One of its articulations is the vision of state, which, being more important than an individual person, is also a product of nature like the latter, performing, by nature, moral

functions: it is to implement justice consisting in the establishment of order or introduction of unity into multitude. Plato's *dictum*: „everyone should do their own”, or that which *he is qualified* to do, what is justly due to him, is concretized in contemporary social sciences, *mutatis mutandis*, in the research approaches of positivist origin, especially in structuralism and functionalism. According to them, the subject moves unconsciously in the structures of social practices, where, like in the Platonic state, there is no room for any whim.

The second way of interpreting the problem of political identities is of modern origin – Machiavelli can be regarded as its father. It assumes that man and his artifacts, including institutions of social and political life, are infinitely flexible beings, always undergoing change. There is no longer one reason here, no one is therefore obliged to strive for perfection/justice, for the actualization of the nature/essence of either oneself or the world around. This world is as it is/as it is becoming. What is just in it is not what *is due* to someone but what someone already *has*. This is a nominalist thesis. In political application such a standpoint is attributed to liberalism (theories of social contract), whereas in theoretical application some authors attribute it to postmodernism,¹ and others to hermeneutics and all manner of phenomenological varieties.² Fundamental to modern political thought, this standpoint is no innocent speculation, on the contrary – its implications are the reason for the radical criticism that liberal thought encounters from the very beginning on the part of conservative and republican orientations. Namely, this is about the sinister vision of atomized society – a community of average, selfish individuals perceiving themselves as self-made men: people independent of institutions, self-determining themselves by means of their own reason. A closer analysis of this reason, however, is hardly favorable to it, because it exposes its autonomy – cold and logical calculation – as only a myth that is to hide the embarrassing truth that the enlightened modern man ultimately follows the instinct of self-preservation in his life; he places the feelings of fear of death and pleasure above intellectual cognition.³

The third of the aforementioned solutions of the issue of political identities is made up of intermediate standpoints, which hide the picture of man as an autonomous and genuine subject and at the same time an object – a product of the institutionalized order, in which he lives. Their philosophical base consists of

¹ See e.g., I. Shapiro, *Stan teorii demokracji* [The State of Democratic Theory], transl. by I. Kisilowska, Warsaw 2006, p. 126.

² See A. Giddens, *Stanowienie społeczeństwa. Zarys teorii strukturacji* [The Constitution of Society. Outline of the Theory of Structuration], transl. by S. Amsterdamski, Poznań 2003, p. 66.

³ Michael Walzer, commenting on this story known from the history of political doctrines, maintains that the „liberal hero, author of self and social roles, is a mythic invention: it is Shakespeare's Coriolanus, the aristocratic warrior and anti-citizen”, who wishes (but is unable) to live as if man was his own author and knew no relatives. This desire turned into a philosophical ideal and social program has fearful implications because it leads to never-ending disintegration, which may have culminated in recent discussions of the right of children to leave their parents and the right of parents to leave their children. (M. Walzer *Liberalizm a praktyka separacji* [Liberalism and the Art of Separation], transl. by P. Rymarczyk [in:] *Komunitarianie. Wybór tekstów* [Communitarians. Selected papers], Warsaw 2004, pp. 143–144).

mixtures (in different proportions) of two approaches. On the one hand, this is hermeneutics with its vision of *Lebenswelt*, founded on pre-reflexive and non-objectifying experiences and on the proposition that there is no „objective” social reality, only meanings that constantly create it. On the other hand, however, this is positivist thought, drawing from social ontologies: „objective” structures/institutions. This methodological marriage appears to be applied, out of the authors who inspired the present discussion, by Ian Shapiro and Jadwiga Staniszkis in political sciences, by Clifford Geertz in anthropology, or Frank Ankersmit in historiography and political philosophy. This is also the case with sociology, which tries to combine the objective and subjective sides of social life, or look at the individual as a being, which is, on the one hand, subject to social ontology, i.e. follows the standards of behavior embraced by a group (situations defined in institutions), and on the other hand, an autonomous individual pursuing his/her own goals (defining the meanings of situations for his/her own needs and possibilities) in interactions. This is how phenomenological sociology interpreted it, for example in Talcott Parsons’ version, from the perspective of which the meaning of the social world is neither some objective event of it, nor a subjective aspect, a mental experience, of the actors operating in it. It is rather an analytical construct, which derives from individual human actions: they can be comprehended (can be analyzed) only in relation to three dimensions-ways of their organization (not to each of them separately but to all at once). These are the following: the actor’s personality and the systems – social and cultural, or the patterns of regular (structured, reified, and objective in this sense) practices.⁴ This clear tripartite division of analysis of human meanings was modified by Anthony Giddens, who claimed that structure is not so much something ‘external’ of actors/individuals as ‘internal’. This means that practices do not – in his opinion – entirely get of our control, that we are not merely cogs in their machinery, for we are able to control them to some extent or reflect upon them. In other words, the author of the theory of *structuration of systems* assumes that man understands his everyday behaviors in a dual way: (one) in reflection or discursive consciousness, which is knowledge of what he does and why, which involves practical consciousness (two) – the basis of *Lebenswelt*, our (usual) routine everyday social activity. This means that everyday constitution of social life is, as Giddens says, carried out in interactions, the actors of which are mutually in a dialectical clash of autonomy and dependence. They constitute social practices, being at the same time constituted by the latter, or, in other words: they have certain discursive consciousness of what they do, which, however, is always somehow limited, and never embraces all consequences of the actions it monitors.⁵

⁴ On this subject see Z. Bauman, *Hermeneutics and Social Science. Approaches to Understanding*, London, Hutchinson 1978, pp. 145–146.

⁵ A. Giddens, *op. cit.*, p. 21, 22, 54, 65, 66.

In the field of political science this balanced solution to the issue of identity is the basis for a number of standpoints, which naturally do not always have the duty and/or need to articulate it, nor do they always have the appropriate instrument to do so. This is the case with the pragmatic orientation, represented for example by Ian Shapiro, who is convinced that man – his identity: psyche and personality – can be changed but never to an unlimited extent. Social sciences, he maintains, do not agree about the limits of our receptivity to such operations, nor are there any universal methods of carrying them out. The effectiveness of the chosen methods of molding us depends on circumstances. If so, Shapiro gives the following advice to designers of democratic institutions, maintaining that it seems therefore prudent to work on the foundations in this area and think more about how to modify the existing institutional order rather than how to create it *ex nihilo*. Identities are to some, though unknown, degree constant, but they can adjust to circumstances, stimuli and institutional rules. The goal should therefore be to transform these constraints where it is possible so that, within specified limits, they will change in the way more beneficial from standpoint of democracy.⁶

This is a strictly pragmatic approach to the rationality – understood as efficiency and operationalizability – (of programs) of political actions. However, in consistency with what we have said earlier, this standpoint is also rooted in certain cultural structures, it is thus not free from a specific ontology: for it implicitly contains this third, intermediate solution to the question of political identity (more broadly: social and cultural). It has its philosophical – repeat: not always revealed in empirically oriented political-science studies (as is the case with the American author quoted above) or sociological research⁷ – legitimization in a characteristic combination of positivist-pragmatic (defining truth in a utilitarian and operationist way) and hermeneutic traditions. The latter pursues a Nietzschean theme, this time not the one connected with the self-creation of the subject but with intuition of the identity of knowledge and power. This intuition applies to reality, which is the product of the causative (performative) force of mental-linguistic acts, inseparably mixed with non-linguistic acts. Historically, it was developed in many ways in mutually independent traditions combining, on the one hand, Heidegger and French difference-thinkers, and on the other, ordinary language philosophers (Wittgenstein and his followers) and neopragmatists (e.g. Rorty). We are talking here about scholars who contributed to the change of

⁶ I. Shapiro, *op. cit.*, p. 127/128.

⁷ Among sociologists this methodological consciousness is exhibited by e.g., A. Giddens (*op. cit.*, p. 21); but it is not found in (again e.g.) in Erving Hoffman, although his concept of social situation has its philosophical explanation in phenomenological-hermeneutical concept of the experienced world. See: E. Goffman, *Człowiek w teatrze życia codziennego* [The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life], transl. by H. Datner-Śpiewak and P. Śpiewak, Warsaw 2000; and on this subject: I. Stubar, *Świat przeżywany i totalność. Dwa typy ugruntowania myśli socjologicznej* [The Experienced World and Totality. Two Types of Consolidation of Sociological Thought], transl. by D. Lachowska [in:] *Świat przeżywany. Fenomenologia i nauki społeczne* [The Experienced World. Phenomenology and Social Sciences] Warsaw 1993, p. 241.

direction in the development of contemporary philosophy and more broadly: humanities, the change caused first by the interpretive and then linguistic 'turn'.

From the standpoint developed as part of this orientation, the problem of understanding our relationship with community and tradition is primarily the problem of linguistic/symbolic representations. Their meanings are constructed socially – established, negotiated through interpretation of signs – and can „come to exist only within language games, communities of discourse, intersubjective systems of reference, ways of worldmaking.”⁸ This does mean, however – still from the same standpoint – that there are no longer any political, religious, artistic or cognitive values, that, in other words, the only alternative to these values must be arbitrariness and irrationality. We are not, therefore, dealing here with an exclusive alternative: it is not so that either the human world (the objects and values that make it) exists *actually*, which would mean: in reality, independent of consciousness/language, or it does not exist actually, being only a construct of either of the two, and since it is only thus conceived it can be arbitrary. The presented perspective of study of social identities assumes that they (objects and values) exist *actually, in fact*, although in a different meaning of the word from that which metaphysicians attribute to it. The latter associate it with an autonomous being, radically (e.g. structurally, existentially, and contentually) transcendent to our consciousness. Those who espouse the idea of constructing meanings, in turn, hold that *social beings* (political, cultural), rooted in the real world, i.e. in a specific people, living in a given time or place, exist in *factuality*, that is, as phenomenologists would say, *heteronomically*, or in a purely intentional way, and therefore dependent on the consciousness and language of this particular people. In contact with the beings in question, language and the world given to us in experience become intermingled, as a result of which, as phenomenologists say, reality is „set (positioned)” by representations, while hermeneuticists add that it then assumes *a narrative identity*.⁹ Both descriptions (the domain of experience), and narrative representations of the world (as certain proposals for structuring it they are always governed by the principles of consistency and uniformity), which we use in these fields, are mutually intermingled, consequently, there is no point in speaking about some *true* reality. Nor is there any point in speaking about political practices that should be representations of some earlier, ready-made identities (*true* in this sense), some unambiguous *us* and them (in terms of

⁸ C. Geertz, *Zastane światło. Antropologiczne refleksje na tematy filozoficzne*, [Available Light. Anthropological Reflections on Philosophical topics] trans. by Z. Pucek, Krakow 2003, p. 99.

⁹ „Representation ‘sets’ (positions, puts) reality according to some specific model, which we have called ideology, and it is in this sense that any representation is ‘thetical’, as Husserl would say, and therefore constituting a sense, which reality does not have without it. (ideology). The Greek word *thesis* means exactly ‘placing, positioning’, which was translated into Latin as *positio*. Representation therefore sets/positions reality, which means that anyone who embraces a specific ideology of representation takes a specific position towards reality, or, quite literally, formulates some thesis on it.” (M.P. Markowski, *O reprezentacji* [On representation] [in:] (eds) M.P. Markowski and R. Nycz, *Kulturowa teoria literatury. Główne pojęcia i problemy* [Cultural Theory of Literature. Principal Concepts and Problems], Krakow 2006, p. 328). On *narrative identity* see P. Ricoeur, *Drogi rozpoznania* [Parcours de la reconnaissance] transl. by J. Margański, Krakow 2004, pp. 90–91.

interest and needs, etc.). Neither as communities nor as individuals are we semantic monads, beings tightly closed to one another. We understand ourselves, our own histories, necessarily as only parts of social history, written in a language – our speech, our gestures, feelings, images, and artifacts.

We shall now sum up that which follows from the last, third, solution to the problem of political identities for understanding democracy and relations that obtain in it between the individual and a community. There are three conclusions. First, these are problems involved in symbolic representations, or in structures which we are not entirely aware of but which also do not exist independently of our discursive knowledge. It is assumed here that representations define us – we are dependent on them; they do not make us entirely, however, but thanks to them we are recognizable as specific political „beings” (a Pole, citizen, liberal, patriot etc.). Second, the relation between these representations (i.e. language) and reality, of which we are integral constituent ourselves, is not governed by some universal, logical, or explicit rules. There are no independent criteria – not only in politics but also in science, religion or art – by which we could justify and explain relations between the world and its representation. In part four we shall see that these criteria are set within given communities of discourse and, furthermore, they are more of esthetic character (the purpose being to constitute/set/make reality) than cognitive (the aim is not to cognize it, i.e., the truth about it). Finally, third, all our language representations have something *idealistic or utopian* in them – social reality remains a chaos to us until we choose some representations of it in the form of philosophical, religious, political, literary, or historical texts... that will structure it for us. Their social emanation are „objective” institutions, such as state and law, within which we always function, whether we like it or not. Understanding the social world and language involved in the process is therefore not only the way of cognizing it but also the condition for and principle of its existence.

THE REPUBLICAN VERSUS PRAGMATIC UNDERSTANDING OF DEMOCRACY

The ontological standpoints (the first and third of the aforementioned) in the debate on democracy translate into an epistemological dispute over what is more important: abstract notions or experience. Which should be trusted more? Those who insist that communities are something natural are more inclined to trust the concepts that are part of true and at the same time certain cognition rather than empirical knowledge. Which is why these people generally exhibit supercilious and resolute attitudes in life and science, and cannot stand a plurality of values and views. In comparison with those, however, pragmatists are minimalists – open to diversity, capable of giving up a monopoly of infallibility and trusting experience more. What kind of social experience should it

be, however, that would legitimize this minimum common good, which could permit them to speak about democracy?

Measuring (successes of) democracy obviously depends on how we define it. The simplest way to do it is to adopt voting and eligibility rights as a criterion – it is a zero-one criterion, by which democracy obtains when such rights are vested in all adult men and women, and it does not when they are not. We are talking here about a political system, the existence of which is associated exclusively with the technical matters of legitimization of authority. Only that much is enough. The matter is far more complicated if aside to voting and eligibility rights (civil rights) we also want to take into account social laws when trying to recognize democracy. The latter can, however, be understood in different ways, and different values are thus attributed to them.

Social laws are of little significance from the perspective of ethics of virtues, which is part of the solidaristic conception of state and society rooted in substantial metaphysics. The latter harmonizes with the Christian-conservative people's worldview dominant in Polish society. The legends and historical myths in it sanctify the state and nation – they are becoming an ideology similar to religion.¹⁰ It is to such popular imagination that the right-wing appeals to, being generally devoid of in-depth philosophical-political reflection. One of its examples is the texts by Ryszard Legutko, who argues that systemic and constructive thinking on the new political system in Poland can be only republican rather than democratic. Why? There are two reasons for this. One is, let us say – of empirical nature: it is a negative observation on the state of democracy in today's Western world. In Legutko's view this system there reached „the limit of its development capacities, and even distinct symptoms of exhaustion or plainly a crisis appeared.” The other reason is strictly substantive: when analyzing the logic of democratic thinking this philosopher concludes that it „focuses our attention above all on the problem of representation, equal participation in power, or group entitlements, that is on the problems that, however important they may be, do not guarantee an efficient system at all, and can sometimes be even an obstacle to such a system.” His conclusion reads as follows: „In other words, the object of republican reflection is a good system, whereas the object of democratic reflection is a democratic system”.¹¹

Republicans, such as Legutko or for example Roger Scruton, focus their attention on the Aristotelian-Thomist concept of virtue and the concept of state,

¹⁰ The passions that they can evoke among the faithful/citizens are constantly heated up to such an extent that these people feel so favored among the nations in the world that some of them postulated recently that the Polish Parliament should crown Jesus Christ King of Poland. His Mother, Holy Mary, as Queen of Poland, is no longer enough for them.

¹¹ R. Legutko, *Demokracja i republika*, <http://www.omp.org.pl/legutko04.htm>, p. 9, 10. Such an adverse attitude towards democracy and liberalism is not exhibited by other Polish proponents of republican political philosophy like e.g. Marcin Król or Paweł Śpiewak. On this subject see e.g. M. Król, *Idee i polska praktyka. Republikańizm jako słowo klucz* [Ideas and Polish practice. Republicanism as a key word] „Dziennik”, „Europa” insert, no. 119/2006-07-12, p. 11.

which is the proper subject of freedom and the source of imperatives to the virtuous individual: it has a hierarchical order, there is discipline and order in it, it determines the relations of command and obedience, promotes the values of honor and dedication to the higher cause of the common good. They (republicans) assume that there is a certain fundamental level of politics, to which no phenomena known from experiencing it can be reduced. Similarly, they also accept that there is something like a certain „natural” course of social processes with which politics thus conceived is consistent.¹² All this means, in other words, that republicans are convinced that in our everyday actions and social interactions we are controlled by the patterns/standards of rationality, deeply rooted in our „nature”, and together with it in culture, being thereby hidden from our consciousness. Only they (republicans) have access to them and are able to reveal them to us, common people.

It is true that *the object of democratic reflection is the democratic system*, with a reservation, however, that it is by no means focused only on its technical issues, connected with elections and representation, but also on axiological ones. This is an essential difference. In identifying values/social laws we do not have to invoke here the authority of „nature” (‘a good political system’ = one consistent with nature); instead, we should trust experience more, which, in the order of perfection of being, cannot unfortunately compare with virtues. For experience is more often connected – to recall Aristotle for a while – with our belief, conviction (*doxa*) than with knowledge, which is the issue in the case of virtues or our permanent dispositions, ethical worthiness. The former type of contact with reality is a source of uncertainty for us, the latter – a source of certainty and happiness, which, as Aristotle says, appears to be something best and divine, and a blessing.¹³ Unfortunately, the social laws vital to democracy do not refer first of all to theoretical knowledge of „a good political system.” For an attribute of the latter is a tendency to impose alien forms on the world, seen both among all

¹² See and compare the following opinions: „Leftist slogans are certainly not what they used to be. Capitalism, large corporations or private ownership are no longer the enemy but religion, family, Western civilization are. The motives behind this remain unchanged, however: rejection of *ordinary processes* of social life, mechanisms of social reproduction, discipline and order that enables passing cultural heritage from generation to generation. The goal that defines the left is, I believe, as follows: emancipate the present from the past” (R. Scruton, *Lewica wczoraj i dziś* [The Left Yesterday and Today], transl. by T. Bieroń, „Dziennik”, „Europa” insert, no. 22/2004-09-01, p. 12; italics mine). „Republicanism, by introducing the concept of virtue or referring to the classical presentations of state (...) [seeks] to point to a certain level of political reality, which cannot be reduced either to administration or activities as part of civic society, or to general democratic negotiations” (R. Legutko, *Demokracja i republika* [Democracy and Republic] p. 10). And finally Andrzej Szahaj’s reply: „Also a conservative conviction about the existence of human nature, free development, spontaneous human action etc. is an element of a certain philosophical construction, a certain project. Except that conservatism must conceal this for doctrinal reasons. We can thus dismiss the conviction that there is something that is nothing but the element of life and is not subject to any impact of that which is constructed in one way or other. We are dealing therefore with a clash of different visions of the world rather than a conflict between a constructed project and life itself”. (A. Szahaj, *Antyliberalizm na skróty* [Short Cuts to Anti-liberalism] „Dziennik”: „Europa” insert, no. 52/2006-12-30, p. 8).

¹³ Aristotle, *Etyka nikomachejska* [Nicomachean Ethics], transl. by D. Gromska, Warsaw 1982, p. 28 (I 8. 1099 b18).

manner of supporters of the authoritarian state, and among legalist liberals, who treat procedures (the rules of the market game) as the only way of solving social problems. The application of these laws is rather a matter of practice, matters in which people are guided more often by intuition/sense rather than thought. These laws are therefore *difficult to measure* although they apply to something that we regard as an intuitive basis for assessing the social efficiency of a system. The issue is the quality of human relations obtaining in it, the mental condition of citizens, which depends on the degree of consistency/coherence of their own ideas (representations formed under the influence of school, family, and the Church) of justice, equality etc. with the empirical world or with what they see and what they are able to comprehend of what is going on around.

Since we have, however, established that there is a feedback between ideas/representations and the reality *constituted* by them, and they cannot be separated from one another, then how can they be incoherent, why does the problem of the desirable consistency between them arise? The key to it is probably that which is loftily called human freedom: we are responsible in some way, also in the public dimension, for everything that happens around us – in the sense that this is the object of our acceptance or challenge, of our opinions, decisions, actions, or omissions. It appears therefore that the consistency of relations connecting us with the world can be measured using (I might say) freedom indicators which dominate and give the complex whole a certain orientation or style. Three of them seem to be the most important. The first is the sense of being the subject or object in the political game, that is either citizens are convinced that they can influence the course of public affairs very important to them, or, quite the contrary, they have no illusions that these are running their former course, entirely independent of their will. The second indicator, which gives a characteristic style to the civic condition, is the sense of elementary social justice – being aware of the inevitability of punishment to villains but also of reward and recognition to good-doers; and respectively, being aware of the *vanity* of the social order where things are just the converse: rewards to tormentors-criminals, and punishment and humiliation to their victims. This was deplored already by the Biblical Ecclesiastes or (etymologically) ‘a man who takes part in the deliberations of an assembly’: „There is a vanity which is done upon the earth; that there be just *men*, unto whom it happeneth according to the work of the wicked; again, there be wicked *men*, to whom it happeneth according to the work of the righteous: I said that this also *is* vanity “ (Ecclesiastes 8.14, King James Version). The third indicator is certainly the ethics of work, according to which honest work is a path to economic and social advancement. Vanity – to continue the preacher’s lamentation-refrain – is when work does not provide the means for a life of dignity, and it is the cunning ones that are most successful: they live in a lap of luxury, using only their contacts and connections.

Freedom indicators do not completely define the democratic state but they serve as the ultimate criterion or diagnostic feature, by which this type of state is

identified and assessed by its citizens: because the interest of individual freedom is inseparably combined with the interest of the whole – the rule of law and the public interest. The political is realized in no other world than the one that determines individual free choices. This means, however, that the latter with the whole takes place only within certain common sense of the community and the discourses that support it. Therefore the indicators always owe their seeming *naturalness* and *practicality* to some combination of colloquial thought (everyday experience) and abstract systems such as law, morality, specific traditions/philosophical, religious or historical narrations. The proportions between the two elements vary: with republicans, who use the categories of Aristotelian-Thomist metaphysics, the share of colloquial thought appears to be insignificant, or at any rate certainly far smaller than with pragmatists. The latter, on the other hand, seek to attain the balance between these elements, being guided by sensitivity – we shall call it esthetic (etymologically, from the Greek *aesthesis* denoting sensitivity, perception): instead of speaking about good and perfecting virtues, they prefer to talk about fighting against evil – for them its model form is human suffering (closest to experience), and the way of experiencing it is the duty to minimize it: bring relief to the suffering.¹⁴

The consistently pragmatic political thought also offers a certain minimum of understanding democracy, a narrow conception of the common good, as a system of managing power relations in such a way as to limit domination diagnosed by means of the aforesaid freedom indicators. The word ‘limit’ means here that *pragmatically understood democracy sensibly recognizes politics as a historical process of establishing inequalities both in the area of political and civil liberties (constituting so-called equal opportunities) and those relating to economic and/or cultural values (i.e. associated with education, health protection, lifestyle, etc.). Justice in democracy means a demand for genuine equality of opportunities and the elimination or alleviation (as far as possible under given circumstances) of the latter type of inequalities, which determines this equality.* Therefore democracy does not aim at attaining the ideal of absolute freedom (rights) of individuals or the ideal of their absolute equality. It thus protects them, on the one hand, from group pressure (undue participation in public life, which ends in the renunciation of oneself, and conformism), and on the other hand, from domination by the stronger (who are guided by selfishness and familiarism). Democracy, in a pragmatic conception, thus assumes that the values of freedom and equality complement each other in the social world. Neither any majority nor strong individuals – both charismatic leaders and scholars-experts – can threaten

¹⁴ This idea was probably best expressed by Karl R. Popper in his principle of negative utilitarianism and anti-utopianism: we should try to eliminate evil rather than promote abstract good, we should not aim at establishing happiness by political means, rather aim at the elimination of concrete miseries. But we should not strive to attain these aims indirectly, by developing and realizing a remote ideal of society, which is entirely good. (R. Popper, *Conjectures and Refutations* [1963], quoted after: A. Chmielewski, *Dwie koncepcje jedności. Interwencje filozoficzno-polityczne*, [Two Concepts of Unity. Philosophical-political Interventions] Bydgoszcz-Wrocław 2006, p. 78).

to transform it into some form of captivity and dictatorship. A realistic confirmation that in politics there are tendencies for inequality opens to democracy a pragmatic prospect of competition (which will be dealt with later). All these general (general philosophical) properties, when translated into political realities, relate to the political system, in which the right to participate in decision-making processes – the right of representation – depends on whether the interest of an individual will be affected by these decisions, in which the state should sometimes interfere with negotiations (but not with deliberations), striving for justice (understood as a greater equality of the parties) by strengthening – through concrete actions – the weaker party whose essential interest is threatened.¹⁵

Finally, one more remark: the pragmatic conception of democracy, though superficially free from metaphysics, actually assumes some variety of it – the one, for example, that speaks of the precedence of evil over good, and about the need to take up actions, which, if they cannot eliminate evil, should at least make it more bearable, thereby preventing the existing state of things from turning into an even worse condition. In politics, this principle amounts to recognizing its „natural” tendencies to establish inequalities, and correspondingly to making social devices for administering justice, understood (minimally) as combating relations of domination of the stronger over the weaker.

POST-SOLIDARITY SOCIETY: A SKETCH FOR THE PICTURE

It is time to look back at the past seventeen years of the so-called political system transformation in Poland. Its obvious success lies in that today we are living in a free country, that our Polish state has attained independence – the most important and noblest value in the history of Poland's traditions of freedom, and its citizens are members of the nation. However, in this presentation I am interested in something else – the socio-psychological condition of the citizens, and with it, in a qualitative profile of democracy: the quality of the community established in it. When making *a sketch for the picture* of Polish society I am not dealing with the sociological description of its political orientations, nor am I going to identify a specific view with the programs of particular political parties that change in time. I will rather seek to comprehend the tendencies – ideas and languages – of political and public life in Poland, which will allow me to answer the question whether under the conditions of freedom we, as society, succeeded in attaining any (if not consensus then at least) compromise on the values associated with what I called *freedom indicators*?

¹⁵ See I. Shapiro, *op. cit.* p. 65, 70–71, 135–137; M. Walzer, *Polityka i namiętność. O bardziej egalitarnym liberalizmie* [Politics and Passion. Toward a More Egalitarian Liberalism], transl. by H. Jankowska, Warsaw 2006, p. 144, 155.

Transformation, Polish Style

We may begin by stating that the concept of systemic transformation employed to define the transition from real socialism – a form of post-totalitarianism – to democracy, has at least two drawbacks.

First, it is not precise enough, rather lucid – it refers to the process of which we know when it started and whom it concerns – but it is not too clear-cut, because we do not entirely know what exactly it concerns and what its limit is. We are dealing with a totally unprecedented large-scale operation in the social and historical dimension. No society has previously passed from communism to liberal democracy. What is more, as far as Poland is concerned, we have had hardly any democracy throughout our history. Which is why we do not have any tried and tested cultural models, symbolic frameworks, by referring to which we could formulate new political problems and react to them. Therefore we do not quite know how, under these circumstances, to distinguish between the ‘normal’ from the ‘non-normal’, what to recognize as order and what as chaos and disorder, and also as a result – what temporal limits can be set at all for transformation as a transition period. It may already be complete or perhaps not yet? It appears that equally strong arguments can be found for either answer. At this stage this is an insolvable dispute. It resonates as growing discomfort in people who are constantly being convinced that they are living in some indeterminate transition state.

Second, a negotiated transformation is by nature a highly risky process, one could even say that it is doomed in advance to *certainly* fail. This must be so when the elite tries to impose something on society, and set the conditions of the agreement (handover, takeover, and sharing of power) without having a democratic mandate itself. No wonder therefore that political scientists, especially those of the democratic world, non-involved, voice hardly enthusiastic statements on the subject. This was so right after the turn of the 1989/90 and this is also the case now, over a decade and half later. One of them, Ian Shapiro, whom we already know, writes in his book *The State of Democratic Theory* (2003) that there is no conclusive evidence that a negotiated transformation is a better way of introducing democracy than the existing alternatives to give it a permanent character. The main participants of negotiations may be little interested in setting up institutions friendly to the proper functioning of democracy if the latter were in conflict with short-term political interests. Negotiations are successful as long as the main negotiators can find a common platform of agreement and marginalize, co-opt or convince the opponents to accept it. Whether the platform will prove to be beneficial to democracy is either a matter of lucky coincidence, or it also depends on whether the main actors will be able to adopt the attitude of statesmen and rise above short-term interests.¹⁶

¹⁶ I. Shapiro, *op. cit.*, p. 113–114. The first serious study of the process of systemic transformation was most probably made by S. P. Huntington, see idem, *Trzecia fala demokracji* [1st ed. 1991, *The Third Wave*], transl. by A. Dziurzik, Warsaw 1995, pp. 156–166.

We must remember that, the agreements between the democratic opposition and the communist government negotiated at the Round Table opened the way to democracy in Poland, and what's more, what stance we take towards them – accept or reject, or at least amend them considerably – is still even now one of the major identifiers of the main actors of Polish political scene. This is a key criterion of the division into the supporters of a solidary Poland (thus defined in 1980/81) and a liberal one (allegedly betrayed by the signatories of the Round Table agreement who, as the former claim, secretly agreed to share power and influences with the communists), suggesting a division of the recent history of the Republic of Poland into two periods: the rule of the „liberals”, summarily attributed to the Third Republic of Poland, and the rule of the proponents of a „solidary state” (from 2005), i.e. the Fourth Republic.

If it is only (as much as?) a lucky coincidence embodied in statesmen fighting against evil to defend the weak in order to build an inclusive society that is to decide, as Shapiro would have it, about the success of democracy thus realized in Poland, then, in short, Poland's luck has failed. It is a fact that over the past seventeen years the successive governments with the signatories to the Round Table have had roughly the same style of exercising power. It consisted above all in the partification (colonization by a party) of the state, including the state sectors of the economy. Important positions in it were occupied by arrogant, corrupt people fond of bureaucratic privileges. As a result, the country's economy was convulsed by scandals. This class was mainly focused on their own interest, their survival, rather than on serving the society. All this made the public think of the authorities according the well-known pattern of communist times: „us-them”, which was based on the conviction that no decent, honest man should be engaged in politics. This belief reached its culmination in a society which, when tested for the presence of the second of the aforementioned freedom indicators, answers in the negative. It has problems with identity, it stops recognizing itself, because it neglected the work of remembrance (crowned by the work of mourning carried out in the spirit of forgiveness). This work would consist in the legal and political expression of wrongs suffered, and in compensating the victims of the previous system for injustices, and calling evil evil, and good good. The carrying-out of this work presupposed active social integration, in which the political elite – principal beneficiaries of transformations – was not interested. Its personal composition in the period in question, largely owing to the proportionate election law provided for in the Constitution, remains roughly the same today, with only the names of the parties represented by the same politicians changing all the time.

This state of democracy, characterized by the crisis of participation and representation, provoked by the domination/rule of the elite, probably had to occur by virtue of transformation logic itself. Negotiations on systemic changes had to be conducted essentially by people willing to compromise, both on the part of the communist leadership and the leaders of democratic opposition. The agree-

ment concluded between them had to guarantee their participation in power, which also meant participation in the division of so-called national wealth. The division was connected with the privatization of it – one of the main elements of transformation, which determined the uncertainty of this process because it is by nature most corruptogenic. It is on the basis of privatization that the largest fortunes in Poland arose rather than owing, for example, to the capital brought from abroad by patriotic Polish emigrants (to refer, by analogy, to one of the mechanisms that was decisive to sensational economic success in Ireland in the 1990s). Access to the pie – power and wealth – had certainly to be limited. The former heroes of the struggle for democracy – the workers – did not get any slice of it. The American scholar David Ost, who studies post-communist democracy, asks today a rhetorical question whether it is not a blemish on post-communist democracy that the main losers were those who made it possible? That those whose solidarity strikes helped create capitalist democracy were soon employed in firms where the management did not tolerate either trade unions or collective agreements? The workers themselves, however, work on a fee-for-task contract basis, without social security and legal protection, with the constant threat of immediate dismissal? That at the end of the 1990s a typical suicide victim in Poland was not a teenage person in an existential crisis but an over-forty-year-old married man living in one of the countless towns or villages, where the bankruptcy of state enterprises and state farms, coupled with the collapse of the former welfare state, has produced an especially oppressing atmosphere of despair?¹⁷

These words do not, I believe, come from the author's excessive leftist sensitivity. It is enough to browse the latest European Commission report on social protection and integration (2007) to find that Ost's judgment is by no means biased. According to the Commission, Poland occupies the lowest position in Europe regarding the promotion of active integration of the most disadvantaged social groups.¹⁸ This is a remarkably meaningful achievement of the cradle of „Solidarity” trade union under the conditions of freedom. The split taking place in Polish society since the early 1990s was the original sin of the young democracy. The sin of dividing society into two parts: the losers, seen as disgruntled persons and failures, and the winners – people of success. The latter can, to put it simply, be divided into two groups. One consists of the so-called new elite of young, bold entrepreneurs, able to take advantage of the new, absorptive market and fill it with attractive, mostly foreign, commodities; and representatives of what journalists call young urban professionals (*yuppies*), well educated, worshipping individualism, and work, not manual but creative, in such capitalist

¹⁷ D. Ost, *Organizowanie gniewu w demokracji – polityka po komunizmie i po „Solidarności”* [Democracy and the Organization of Anger – post-communist and post-Solidarity politics] [from *The Defeat of Solidarity. Anger and Politics in Post-communist Europe*], transl. by T. Bieroń, „Dziennik”, „Europa” insert, no. 93/2006-01-11, p. 10.

¹⁸ The European commission assumes that „active inclusion offered through a balanced approach combining personalized labor market support, high quality social services and adequate level of minimum income strengthens the inclusion of the most disadvantaged” (Reference: IP/07/203 Date: 19/02/2007).

sectors as marketing, advertising, journalism or politics. The other group of beneficiaries, however, are those taking advantage of previous and current connections and relations, both corporate (especially legal and medical professions dominated by family coteries) and political, especially informal ones of clientist and crony nature. The media sometimes call them the *republic of cronies*.

The Round Table agreement therefore opened a way for the liberal model of economic development, the price of which was a divided society and the growing feelings of mutual hatred and prejudice inside it (which I shall discuss below). The origin of these was the unjust distribution of costs of transformations: the highest were borne by workers, farmers and the budget sphere (public sector) employees. The protected ones, however, were the elite of both the former ruling party (communists) and the previous opposition coalition. In practice, the marginalization of so large a part of society meant that the agreements could not guarantee one thing to their signatories: success when confronted with the public, however manipulated by the media. History has shown that no politician-signatory retained the position of a statesman for at least two terms in a row, the exception being President Kwaśniewski but he found it very hard to accomplish – he paid the price of actively participating in the formation of political capitalism, undisguised connections with the business world of doubtful provenance. Today only someone very naïve may still believe that all Round Table negotiators „rose above short-term interests”, and particularly, that the communists gave up everything overnight – their real influence on the exercise of power, held in non-democratic institutions: banks, economy, media, in the system of justice, and also in those most difficult to control by the new democratic institution, i.e. in the secret services. Neither the media, nor economy (mainly the energy sector), nor the judiciary were vetted in Poland; and as regards the secret services, they were explored mainly in order to retain their continuity. Omissions in this area have the consequence of *inter alia* mass corruption, scandals arising at the meeting point of politics and economy, but also of the democratic state and the remnants of the communist past still functioning in it. Hence the secret-police files scandals kindling people’s imagination – reports about public figures (politicians, journalists, and priests) working as secret police informers or about the illegal activities of the WSI (military intelligence service) – continuators of secret services in communist Poland..

Overshadowed by these events, the so-called ordinary citizens (about whom, among others, David Ost wrote) are living their lives, subjected to the experiment of privatizing the young democratic state. These people are left to themselves, to face the harsh realities of free-market economy every day. To be objective in assessing the social costs of the dichotomous divisions of social structure discussed here, I shall again refer to an *independent arbiter* – this time to one of the most eminent sociologists of our time – Richard Sennett. He has no qualms about presenting his point-blank opinion in the Polish press that we, of so-called real socialism, embraced the neoliberal model, something that does not

deserve to be called society at all.¹⁹ We could wonder only out of curiosity what the American sociologist would say if only he also knew anything about the functioning of Polish political capitalism. We could help our imagination by referring to the diagnoses proposed by Jadwiga Staniszkis. She says: Governing well requires extremely elitist discourse and at the same time retaining respect for the people governed. Instead of populism, it is necessary to persuade them to participate through education. Marginalization of so large a part of society has become a serious obstacle to development. The lack of demand is the lack of development dynamics. Therefore, fighting poverty is a priority to all the political.²⁰

However, the author of these words cannot, incidentally, be treated *as an independent arbiter* as was the case with Shapiro, Ost or Sennett – and not only because she is inside here and views things from a Polish perspective but also, and perhaps first of all, that she herself actively constructs the presented divisions of the post-Solidarity society. She uses the rhetoric of the clerks ('elitist discourse', 'respect for people') at the same time trying to impress the reader in the same book by the passages, where she desperately attempts to prove her caste exclusivity in relation to workers. In one of the autobiographical themes she recollects: The same plumber staggered into the flat, having already had some drinks. He dropped to his knees and asked me to also say something to him, as he put it, 'beautifully incomprehensibly'. And I, to get rid of him, hurled at him several phrases of vulgar abuse in prison slang, which I had learned at the Rakowiecka street prison.²¹

Conclusion. The effect of transformation so far (also) includes the picture of society, which can be presented as a system of relations arising from dichotomous divisions and the concomitant group privileges and disadvantages. One group are the winners or those who have access to political, economic or cultural authority. The last kind denotes the ability to exert influence on people with the means that intellectual domination gives the winners: it is manifested not only in measurable opportunities for advancement and career but also in the (immeasurable) creation of representations that constitute the social world, molding the public sphere, and defining the criteria for the correctness and significance of the themes and problems posed in it. The other group are those that, systematically, do not have such possibilities. The former are as a rule cosmopolitan, inclined to be guided in all their behaviors – at home, at work, and in the state – by European and global models and values. The latter, on the contrary, – in response to the changing conditions, to the far-going transformations of the surrounding world – seek their identity by going back to the roots. They need traditions, they demand settling accounts with the contemporary history. They do not accept that the guilty men are publicly treated the same as their victims.

¹⁹ R. Sennett, *Neoliberalizm zabija społeczeństwo* [Neoliberalism kills society] „Dziennik”, „Europa” insert, no. 149/2007-02-10, p. 2.

²⁰ J. Staniszkis, *O władzy i bezsilności* [On Power and Powerlessness] Krakow 2006, p. 182.

²¹ *Ibidem*, p. 232.

The Language of Divisions and Contempt

We always formulate our views, beliefs, and wantings in language; therefore, while articulating them, we use, necessarily, the standards of correctness (semioticians sometimes speak here of meta-languages, meta-mechanisms) passed down by tradition: they are inseparably blended with our experience – this mode ultimately determines how we understand the nature of truth, freedom, authority, justice, and what representations of them (i.e. utterances/texts/narratives) we make. As we have already said above, it is never so that on the one hand there is *some objective reality*, and on the other – us, impartial observers of it. We always already understand the surrounding world in some way, yet it is difficult to establish precisely how much of it is in us, and us in it. In other words, it is difficult to determine to what extent we are its creators (in how much it is the work of our voluntary acts) and to what extent its creations – unconscious executors of the orders it emits. What and how we speak and think of the world and our relations with it, we construct influenced by religious, family, or school traditions, but also by the overwhelming impact of the media. All these channels of transmission together pass to us some set of socially acceptable forms of living. They have a favorable impact on our psyche and personality only if they all together provide a coherent picture of the morally and intellectually comprehensible world.

We cannot apparently hope for such comfort any longer, and probably not only in Poland. But it is Poland that we are especially interested in. Over the last almost two decades we have witnessed with our own eyes the change of public language. Out of the concepts we have previously used, some were discredited in the past era while others were disqualified by the adopted Western (generally identified as *liberal*) political correctness. It is in light of the latter that after 1989 such concepts as *social justice*, *welfare state*, *community*, *tradition* or *patriotism* acquired a shameful meaning not only in political but also public discourse in general. The subject of social injustice was entirely anathematized. It was regarded as politically incorrect by both the left and the right of the political scene. Anyone who tried to show the causes and ways of combating injustice fell victim to a war for public language – the control of it means power over social reality, including the shape and division of the political scene. Thus, on the market of ideas they were quickly „taken care of” by a team with a sufficiently potent media firepower to disqualify them from power games for long. To name those on the left, the right used (and still does) the most negatively-sounding insult – Commies [*komuchy*], synonymous with populism and political cynicism; the left summarily called the right wing the loony fanatics [*oszołom*] and narrow-minded, bigoted prigs [*ciemnogród*], the terms with such connotations as nationalist, fascist or anti-Semitic. In short, there was no favorable atmosphere for the defenders of the disadvantaged. If poverty or unemployment were mentioned at all, the language used was that of deprivation, which in sociology was

associated with such vocabulary as: *exclusion, marginalization, confinement in the local space: housing estate or wooden barrack ghettos, inheriting poverty, new poverty, the new proletariat*. And the newspaper language said that, the poor not so much 'fall into the trap of welfare benefits' as they are *inert, adopt demanding and clientist attitudes, show reluctance to act and think by and for themselves, attached to post-socialist behemoths, unwilling to improve their education, change place of residence* – in a word, they have only themselves to blame.²² In reaction to public positive evaluation (dominant in the media) of such features as *being modern, observing European standards and tolerant*, identified with the liberal left, the right used the language of conservative radicals with such epithets as egg-heads [*jajogłowi*] or (recently in the vocabulary of the Fourth Republic), pseudo-elite [*łże-elity*] or pseudo-intellectuals, pseudo-intelligentsia [*wykształciuchy*], who form a system/web of connections [*układ*]. For them the word *liberalism* has become a bugaboo, synonymous with *communism*, if a need arises (see *lumpenliberalism* by analogy to Marxist *lumpenproletariat*) – an *argument of large stick* against all those who are pro-European and support tolerance towards minorities, especially sexual.²³

The presented brutalization of language is one of the effects of the clash of civilizations, which essentially is/was the process of political system transformation. It consists in molding our social life – its practices and institutions – on the one hand by our native language games – moral, religious, economic, historical etc.; and on the other hand, by foreign (Western) ones. The latter derive their logic and semiotic code from the state's nominalist ontology, which, in Weberian parlance, has the nature of formal rationality. It shaped the political thinking and actions in Western European countries for good from the seventeenth century on, or from the birth of liberalism. The point is, however, that Poland was never culturally within the range of this ontology. For that reason, Poland's integration with the European structures in 2004 was hardly a „return” to Europe understood in this sense. The millennium-long bond, which linked us with the West was the bond with Christianity.²⁴ These deep cultural determinants, con-

²² G. Majkowska, *Językowe sposoby aksjologizacji w dyskursie publicznym* [Linguistic ways of axiologization in public discourse] [in:] (eds.) J. Bralczyk and K. Mosiołek-Kłosińska, *Zmiany w publicznych zwyczajach językowych* [Changes in Public Language Habits], Warsaw 2001, pp. 41–42.

²³ Andrzej Walicki explains the meaning of the right's linguistic attack on the left (remember that we are discussing their mutual acts of aggression) in Polish political debate as follows: „One of the least attractive traits of political culture in the Third and Fourth Republics is truly Orwellian endeavors to control the language of political debate as a precondition for imposing an ideological vision of reality upon the society. The process of appropriation of key words, of giving them strongly evaluative meanings other than before, has unfortunately extended over the whole discourse of Polish anticommunism. The word 'communism' has become synonymous with the PRL [Polish People's Republic], losing all links with communist ideology and the communist vision of the future; 'liberalism' has been narrowed down to free-market economism, 'populism' is now only an insult expression the contempt of the elites for the people, the legal term 'claim' is used as synonymous with a false, unjustified demand, showing a 'populist' or even 'Soviet' mentality. (A. Walicki, *Dzieje antykomunistycznej obsesji* [History of anticommunist obsession] „Dziennik”, „Europa” insert, no. 138, 2006-11-25, p. 4).

²⁴ Among the sociologists who advance this thesis we can name J. Szacki (see his *Liberalizm po komunizmie* [Liberalism after Communism], Krakow 1994) and J. Staniszkis, who writes *inter alia* as follows: The

sisting in the clash/asymmetry of two different ontologies and their associated standards of rationality, make our life complicated today: they make it difficult to understand not only ourselves but also others that we imitate. No wonder that as a result they also have an impact on the character of our newly-emerged democratic public debate,²⁵ in which a belief prevails that we are condemned to imitate and adapt foreign models – concepts and institutions. They turn out to clash with one another often and are inconsistent with reality – they are incompatible with. The enlightened elite likes using here the colonizing arguments that deny all those who allegedly do not understand to say anything what the things are in any „normal democratic country”. This is how the Polish mutation of the so-called „complaining class” expresses their views – their language has dominated public discourses over recent years. A linguist comments upon it as follows: This is the language of the chronically discontented, for whom complaining has become their most appropriate calling: it was not to be like this, we fought for something else. This language is not used to make an impartial description of social phenomena, to name them, or to build a bridge between reality and theoretical recognition. From the height of his/her distinguished position, the intellectual eagerly assumes the alarm-sounding role of Cassandra: ‘We are dealing with a country, where things are going very badly and where the political is collapsing at a lightning pace, which can consequently lead only to a revolution or populism.’²⁶

The political-science significance of statements of this kind is contained first of all in their negative persuasion, consolidating national complexes and stereotypes: it tells the senders and receivers of these communications to be ashamed of their identity and imperfection, to see themselves as inferior. One can hardly expect that they together will be able to develop some consistent conception of the common good. Moreover, dishonesty of that rhetoric also lies in that it conceals the fact that there is not, after all, only one form of democracy binding upon the Western world. Even European Union structures will not help us in the procedure of adoption of foreign models: the EU is not a single model of the system of government for individual member states (it only assumes that they must be democratic – and no more). Moreover, democracy does not mean only Europe but also America, which tends to be an almost constant point of reference in Polish political debate. A point that is strongly idealized because of traditionally pro-American sentiments in Polish society. The mythologization of the

ontological revolution, crucial to Western European nominalism, fundamentally changing the conception of natural law (by rejecting its ontological rooting in human nature, and challenging the Thomist unity of form and matter), never reached us. Consequently, this meant the absence of contact in Poland with Ockham’s metaphysics of state emerging from the space between substantive rationality and formal rationality (rather than – as in Thomism – being perceived exclusively in the perspective of ethical substantive rationality (J. Staniszkis, *O władzy i bezsilności*, *op. cit.*, p. 63).

²⁵ See J. Staniszkis, *Władza globalizacji* [Power of Globalization] Warsaw 2003, p. 25.

²⁶ G. Majkowska, *op. cit.* p. 39–40. Cf. a survey on the subject *Czy Polacy są Europejczykami?* [Are the Poles Europeans?], „Dziennik”, „Europa” insert, no. 1/2004-04-07, p. 12.

United States has a destructive effect on Poland's politics.²⁷ This is happening for many reasons. The most obvious is that the USA is a power whose political system, with such elements as presidentialism, bipartisanship, and federalism, has little in common not only with the Polish but even European reality at all.

Conclusion: Liberal democracy ensures a community's right to reproduce itself – in three fundamental dimensions: family, culture, and morality – but it also demands that all participate in the agora together. It therefore exists and thrives inasmuch as it can attract citizens to engage in public activity, which counts doubly if these citizens belong to groups that respect their own difference and identity, and, certainly, if it does not do them much harm in the process. As such, it therefore satisfies the criteria for the pragmatic definition proposed here. Unfortunately, this mechanism does not, for the time being, function in the newly-emerged post-communist Polish democracy. Its main problem does not lie, however, in that it failed to integrate the society around the consensus (or compromise) over pragmatic values. It appears to suffer from a more serious disease – the one it was born with into the world. For it already had no such intentions at all – it was never concerned with equalizing chances or including those excluded. From the very beginning it was confused with the free market and privatization – of society and state. As a result, a natural conflict between political groups has degenerated in Poland into a state of hostility, where the worst emotions of intolerance, hatred and contempt prevail.

SKETCHING THE PICTURE CONTINUED: ANXIETIES, IDEALS, AND SOCIAL PROJECTS

Ask whether the aforementioned emotions, prevailing on the political scene also resonate among the rest of society? And if so, how does it cope with them? How does it find its place under new civilizational conditions, how does it react to changes? How does it compensate for possible failures of adjustment? And finally, what should a democratic policy, pragmatically understood, consist in in this context?

If we accept the meaning of the world 'understand' as 'explain some phenomenon to oneself by recognizing its fragments and their arrangement in a

²⁷ Roman Kuźniar, an international relations expert, calls this typically Polish idolization of America in the context of Polish transatlantic relations today "„a Radio-Maryja-style pro-Americanism". He explains this concept as follows: „It should not be confused with the Radio Maryja station. What is meant is the uncritical and awed attitude to America, expressed by many serious politicians, and first of all by the major media, which did not admit of critical statements or comments about the Bush administration's policy and war with Iraq. Any critical opinion, if admitted at all, was at once ridiculed and shouted down as an instance of anti-Americanism, pacifism, populism or a new version of anti-imperialism)" (R. Kuźniar, *USA jako sojusznik*, [USA as an Ally] „Dziennik": „Europa" insert, no. 129, 2006-09-23, p. 14). And also some remarks by R. Sennett to Poland: „I think that you'd like the Asian model better – the Japanese road in your case would probably be far better than the American. On the basis of what I know about Poland I am very sorry that you adopted Jeffrey Sachs's shock therapy" (R. Sennett, *op. cit.*, p. 2).

certain whole', then we must admit that this is a rare and problematic way of contacting the world in which we live. As laymen or non-experts, we have problems understanding the sense of economic, administrative or political decisions taken on us, getting acquainted with new technologies that enter our everyday lives, as well as understanding and assessing the significance of massive information (for us as individuals and/or as members of a group: local community, or ethnic, professional or age group, etc.): today we are highly attractive clients for the competing providers of insurance, telecommunications (Internet, cell phones), banking (loans, deposit interest etc.), educational, medical, and other services. The feeling of uncertainly accompanying acts of choice and decision – which is better for us, who should we consult? – naturally arouses anxiety and discomfort under these circumstances. The more this feeling annoys us and the more we feel helpless and lost, the more we long for sense and coherence, we return to that which is well-known, safe, and familiar – we escape to the country or to small towns in order to satisfy there our hunger for sense and the need for security so that we could (at least experimentally) afford the luxury of living in the conditions, where that which we experience differs only slightly from our ideas – stories dear to us told (by parents, grandparents, teachers etc.) about what should be: equality, freedom, right and wrong, and honest and just human relations.

However, it is also true that there is no reason why we should panic at once: our adaptive capacities are, as has been said, enormous, albeit limited, and furthermore, sociologists reassure us that a disturbed sense of security and, complementarily, disturbed social integration occur in any modern society, constantly exposed to the arrival of the new and the exit of the old, to antinomies between stability and change, and freedom and political order.²⁸ We would therefore have to see the exceptional character of our situation in something else: in the state of additional intensification of this disturbance, which occurs both under the conditions of system transformations (it was/is undergone not only by post-communist countries but also the Republic of South Africa) and cultural changes within one system. This also happened in connection with immigrant waves (*Gastarbeiters*, asylum seekers, or inhabitants of former colonies) arriving in great numbers to Germany, France, and the UK in the mid-twentieth century. They formed a new type of society, unknown on such a scale in Western Europe: a multicultural society. Which is why, in the 1980s and even more in the 1990s, a distinct growth of the populist orientation and movements was reported there. This is a sign that both in the West and East there are cultural strains, from which desperate people seek rescue, a way of adjusting to the surrounding world: building a bridge between that which is and that which they would wish to have.

Ideology and the emotions of anger and intolerance associated with it are detrimental to democracy, they legitimize certain attitudes in public life atti-

²⁸ See C. Geertz, *Interpretacja kultur. Wybrane eseje* [Interpretation of Cultures. Selected Essays], transl. by M. M. Piechaczek, Krakow 2005, pp. 234–235.

tudes – populist, chauvinistic, nationalist, which bring it (democracy) to a state of crisis. The anthropologist Clifford Geertz explains them as emotional and intellectual confusion arising from an inability to give social changes a cultural meaning:

This is when neither the most general cultural orientations of a society nor the most down-to-earth pragmatic ones suffice any longer to provide an adequate image of political process that ideologies begin to become crucial as sources of sociopolitical meanings and attitudes. (...) [Cultural strain] is a loss of orientation that most directly gives rise to ideological activity, an inability, for lack of usable models, to comprehend the universe of civic rights and responsibilities in which one finds oneself located.²⁹

We are dealing here with a cultural/symbolic interpretation of nationalist ideologies. Methodologically therefore, this is a semiotic-phenomenological approach, which treats culture as a text or a coded system of meanings. Only conscious subjects able to read and interpret and reinterpret the surrounding world can navigate their way around it. Ideology here is one of the forms of their conscious reflection and interpretation, a model of („for”) reality – socio-political meanings and attitudes.

Two remarks are in order here. First, it is not the only conception of the etiology of nationalism. This phenomenon is also examined from the standpoints of the first of the modes, which we distinguished at the beginning, of presenting the problems of identity – the standpoints inspired by structuralism and post-structuralism. They see the origin of the phenomenon in the ontology of the symbolic system – in some specific cultural logic, whose rules have a causative impact on the social order: they construct in it systems of power and domination that mold/structure the behaviors of social actors at the pre-conscious level.³⁰ Second, since cultural logics are not transparent then we cannot exclude that apart from anger and the will to fight, vital to ideology, there are also other defense mechanisms that become activated in people who are unable to come to terms with the new conditions. Trying to systematize the issue of emotional compensatory reactions to systemic/cultural changes, I would like to point, on the basis of observation, to four of them: aggression, the need of affiliation, fear of being different, and escapism. At the same time they are the ways – to stick to the linguistic convention of this discussion – of coping with the vanities of the world, of expressing behaviors that implement freedom indicators.

When looking for the causes of growing aggression in human relations, also reported among children and the youth (growing violence in schools), one points, *inter alia*, to its social origin, to determinants on the part of the culturally (especially educationally) disadvantaged. Some scholars, fascinated by Schmitt's definition of the political (NB Geertz is not one of them: the Aristotelian under-

²⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 249.

³⁰ For more on the subject, see A. Willford, *Anthropology* [entry in:] *Encyclopedia of Nationalism*, vol. 1, San Diego, Academic Press 2001, p. 10.

standing of the political as the school of judging is closer to him), even treat the feeling of anger – by means of which politicians skillfully manipulate citizens to identify and defeat their own enemies – as the key to the mystery of history of all social systems, including the explanation of the fates of democracy in post-communist countries.³¹ This is a too insufficient – and as history has often demonstrated – too dangerous psychology in the service of both politics and reflection on it. In their actions people are guided by various emotions – in response to the feeling of injustice, to being treated like objects, to loss of the sense of work (all feelings taken together or individually) mixed with the fear of the new, some want to be embraced by the warm arms of the community, where they are subject to group dynamics: they become conformists, similar to their „fellow brothers” and become genuinely radicalized in their views. In the case of young people, the lack of prospects and a sense of helplessness arouse the need for new tribal bonds, where force and violence generally count: they find them in criminal groups, in fascist-tinged organizations (like Młodzież Wszechpolska [All-Polish Youth]), in football-fan subcultures. Others, motivated by the same need, seek refuge in hierarchical communities (such as religious sects extremely popular in Poland in the 1990s or the Radio Maryja Family), which channel anger and control it; they are governed by regulations that require complete subordination – regulations different from those binding in civil society.

However, not all feelings that people show in reaction to changes can be reduced to anger. There are also some who shun participation in public life, being paralyzed by helplessness and discouragement. Passivity is their response to the advent of the new, which they do not understand. The fear of the new is the fear of difference – the fear of otherness, in response to the news that next to them, in the same country, in the same town or neighborhood, there are also some different others: those think differently and live a different kind of lives than they themselves. Consequently, they have no need of politics which irritates them with such *extreme experiences*. The more eagerly then, they go about their own business, they like the situation of being narcissistic, postmodern consumers, for whom a community does not have connotations of place, tradition or custom. „Thus understood, it is associated only with pusillanimous gossip-mongering, snooping neighbors and backward conventions. It starts to be replaced, even though declaratively, by the ‘community of the Western world’.”³² Apart from the abovementioned, there are other people who feel harmed and exploited, and who cannot afford to escape into affluent privacy: left with nothing to live on and no prospects for the future, they decide to leave the country to seek employment and „normal” conditions.

³¹ See e.g., D. Ost, *The Defeat of Solidarity: Anger and Politics in Postcommunist Europe*, Cornell University Press 2005; see excerpt from the book: *Organizowanie gniewu w demokracji...*, p. 10.

³² G. Majkowska, *op. cit.*, p. 43.

According to what we said earlier, our understanding/explaining of sociopolitical reality co-creates it. This also applies therefore to self-descriptions of society (functioning in the public discourse) or linguistic ways of rationalizing/legitimizing its political, moral, and economic behaviors. They are also not free from *setting up* reality. They compete with one another on the market of ideas, where they are more dangerous as philosophical ideals than as postulates. The former are mental constructs – doctrines, sets of propositions, evaluations and norms, which establish sense endowed with, to use philosophical parlance, *constitutive* force, which means that they tend to dominate public language, to attain an exclusive position in it so as to articulate the truth about reality. As a result, they distort/bewitch the latter, establishing that (in our case) this reality is inhabited by something like an ideal, perfect society (this is an example of nationalist ideologies) or, in another version, by absolutely autonomous, free individuals, independent of institutions (neoliberal ideology). Stories about such beings are less dangerous when they assume the form of postulates – sociological, pedagogical or political-science ones, which perform *regulative* functions. As such, they constitute sense, which is (always only partially) verifiable, and can be translated (always only partially) into languages of other solutions, which means that it can be, in effect, operationalized – translated into concrete action. The assessment and verification of them seem to be better served by the esthetic criteria than cognitive ones, in the sense that we are dealing here, nevertheless, with a certain projection-creation of a new world order, with *setting it up* not so much in accordance with the „truth” about it as according to its more or less credible or better conceptions than the rival ones.³³ Recall that we usually speak about social justice using syntactic collocations with words like *sense*, *desire*, *demand* rather than *cognition*, *analysis* or *calculation*.

In this way we are still reconstructing a pragmatic definition of democracy, signaled in Part Two. For the realization of postulates is governed by the notion of truth understood more esthetically/pragmatically than theoretically, i.e. more than in cognitive or normative discourse, where truth is treated as an absolute value, written with capital V, often identified with religious truth in worldview debates. *To understand the truth of sociopolitical projects esthetically/pragmatically means in as non-idealist, non-utopian a way as possible (and if necessarily, then at best in moderately idealist or moderately utopian) so as to see the multiplicity and diversity of the social world, to be able to accept it for itself, to take care (and also fight for if necessary) of those who are dominated in it by the stronger and more articulate ones; to be able to find more of a compromise than a rational agreement between the former and the latter, which means to be able sometimes to abandon the logic of effectiveness and probability and take the risk associated with a project*

³³ On the subject of esthetic criteria in historical studies, see F. Ankersmit, *Narracja, reprezentacja, doświadczenie. Studia z teorii historiografii* [Narrative, representation, experiences. Studies in historiographic theory] Polish title of selected essays, transl. by E. Domańska et al., Krakow 2004, pp. 194–198.

under implementation, and give up the ethics of equivalence (governed by the rule: something for something) for the ethics of giving and sacrifice in order to accomplish the goal.

DEMOCRACY AS SOCIAL PRACTICE

Finally, there is the question about the phenomenon of power in the pragmatic/esthetic conception of democracy I propose here. What remains is to deal with a (seeming) paradox: how can one organize social life and govern it effectively when at the same time one has to avoid domination and any justifications for it by means of doctrines captivating by the power of their rationality?

Political equality, the free media, rights to association, civil rights for minorities are all values constitutive for modern democracy, which take on their own meaning in each individual democratic country, they are socialized differently i.e. realized as part of different social roles performed in various institutional systems that function by virtue of statutory as well as common law. In other words: democracy is a complex social practice, whose values are implemented each time according to different patterns and within different procedures and institutions established to ensure they are observed. Hence follows quite a practical observation for democratic discourse: no one has exclusive rights to the truth about democracy as a political system, no one can speak allegedly on behalf of „normal democracy”, as Polish politicians, and sometimes even representatives of scientific circles, tend to do. This is pure rhetoric for in actuality there is no such thing as „normal democracy”. All the existing forms of democratic power developed in specific time and cultural context. This means, paradoxically, that, already as socialized, they are democratically and hierarchically shaped at the same time. Namely, they are ruled by people whom a society regards as right and competent – in this sense decisions and priorities of the government are at the same time the decisions and priorities of the whole society. Therefore, in democratic practice designed to protect the common good, what also always counts is authority – of persons, places, or institutions. As a result, it is not possible precisely to distinguish here between organizations of individuals that have an equal status as part of the relation of dependence or hierarchy, and organizations that do not have such a status. *Mature democracy (so-called polyarchy) consist in balancing hierarchical and egalitarian elements, or, to put it differently, republican and liberal.* It assumes that we should use all resources (human and institutional: associations, social organizations, churches, local governments etc.) in a given area in order to ensure dynamics and efficiency in the whole system.

To describe this situation, the best term today is the metaphor of *network*, whose meaning I wish to rectify here: it has been commonly used in the negative sense to describe non-hierarchical relations, while I insist that it *de facto* applies to hybrid relations, i.e. egalitarian-hierarchical. The network is a dynamic con-

struction, it demands controllability; to exercise authority in it does not so much mean govern as manage.³⁴ If the network is controllable in one time and place, or there is (relative) harmony there between different logics of thinking and acting, this does not necessarily mean that it can be likewise controllable in a different time and place. Hence follows quite a practical conclusion, according to which the democratic organizations/practices in question cannot be mechanically transplanted onto an alien area, as is likewise the case with economic solutions alone, especially in a neoliberal version. Either carries with it immeasurable social and psychological consequences we have spoken above.

From the concept of democracy reconstructed here follows at least one more property of it, which makes it significantly more precise, i.e. its agonistic character. Socialization is the result of a certain, actually never-ending training, which a society carries out in connection with self-understanding itself and establishing its own identity. The territory of exercise in this field is the area of education, and public sphere where one's own diversity is (should be) recognized and accepted, and consequently, respect should be afforded to the separate social roles and institutional systems, within which they are enacted.³⁵ Recognition of and respect for one another is possible only on condition that there are normative systems that protect against chaos, against mutual interference in the competence and powers reserved for individual social roles and institutions legitimizing them – for example, state and churches, politics and economy. These systems, however, are dynamic and open to new definitions, which is why there are no universal answers to the questions like 'can the state interfere with economy, or is it only a domain of experts, to which democratically elected representatives of the people are denied admittance? Are there possibilities of „politicizing” economy, enhancing the status of legislative bodies and the will of the voters in economic decisions? The lack of unambiguous, universally accepted standpoints on these issues means that the democracy in question cannot cope in practice without constant reflection on the sense and content of the social contract. It exists not by virtue of one act, a political declaration of the elite, which should guarantee the duration, efficiency and stability of the system, but on the basis of inclusive practices that engage the interested parties, in any individual contentious issue, into negotiating how the resolution of it relates to the common good. Negotiation does not mean deliberation – it is taken up by those who are also governed by passions, who really care about the matter, and who do not deem it possible to

³⁴ Controllability – as Staniszkis explains – does not depend on the power of individual persons (Prime Minister, President) but on the quality of institutions, on relations between them (...), and finally on the quality of public discourse. And it does not depend on the existence of the authority of state, which creates trust and joins together a fragmented architecture of webs. And in this new situation, power is the ability to harmonize different logics and levels (on the micro and macro scale), to create conditions for systemic self-regulation (...), to improve the citizens' ability (knowledge), and finally, concentration rather than dissipation of resources, and the iron-clad principle of competence and responsibility – rather than laidbackness (J. Staniszkis, *O władzy i bezsilności* [On Power and Powerlessness] p. 198).

³⁵ See M. Walzer, *Liberalizm a praktyka separacji* [Liberalism and the Art of Separation] pp. 149–150.

compromise about it. They can sacrifice themselves for it, sometimes even give up their lives.

Some³⁶ speak in this case about the agonistic conception of community: the notion of agonism should be understood in opposition to both the notion of consensus and antagonism. Competition means fight between opponents, not enemies, it is therefore fought according to some rules which assume certain mutual recognition of the fighting parties. If, however, we accept (as we have done above) a minimum definition of the common good – we will treat it pragmatically as such management of power as to avoid domination – then the risk of destruction (war instead of political fight) is just as minimal as the danger of unanimity. Unanimity means the victory of only one interpretation of the common good. In the practice of deliberative democracy, or democracy modeled on the concepts of power and legitimacy based on some forms of public reason, on the faith in the rationality of choices and certain collective political decisions, impartial, undisturbed, guaranteed by liberal-democratic institutions – a rational consensus embraces only one interpretation, the one that gained a monopoly, and was most publicized in the public sphere. In order to avoid this consequence – according to the logic of this line of argument – one does not need, however, to artificially revive the division of the political scene into the left and the right.³⁷ Neither political orientation has a monopoly of either the rise of evil/social injustice or combating them. This is so, obviously, if we assume that we are all subject to the ontologies of political practices, institutions and discourses, and none of us can break away from the forms of life and languages associated with them as representations molding our reality. We all also have equal opportunities to domesticate them – reveal and interpret – by the power of our own knowledge and ... character. Therefore, whether or not we avoid, on the one hand, the pitfalls of deliberative democracy, threatening the existence of authority and the plurality of attitudes and values, and on the other hand, the traps of agonistic politics, counting on strong (heroic, outstanding) individuals, and for that reason threatening democracy with the removal of values of altruism and solidarity from it, all these possible scenarios of events lie not only in the decisions made by individual politicians but also in the cultural framework they function in. This framework comprises both formal rationality, which is the culture of dispute and rivalry, the rules governing rational political discussion, and substantive rationality – respect for the attitudes of active opposition against the evil and injustice spreading all over the world. The models of either kind of behavior are elements

³⁶ See e.g. A. MacIntyre, *Dziedzictwo cnoty. Studium z teorii moralności* [After Virtue. A Study in Moral Theory], transl. by A. Chmielewski, Warsaw 1996, [e.g.] p. 396; A. Chmielewski, *Dwie koncepcje jedności. Interwencje filozoficzno-polityczne* [Two Concepts of Unity. Philosophical-Political Interventions], Bydgoszcz-Wrocław 2006, pp. 158–159. Ch. Mouffe, *Paradoks demokracji* [The Democratic Paradox] trans. by W. Jach et al., Wrocław 2005, Chapter 4. On the Nietzschean-aristocratic concept of the political *agon* in Hannah Arendt see R. Wolin, *Heidegger's Children*, Princeton University Press 2001, p. 69.

³⁷ I do not agree with Chantal Mouffe in this respect. See and compare *Dlaczego populizm wygrywa* [Why populism wins] a conversation of S. Sierakowski with Ch. Mouffe, „Dziennik”, „Europa” insert, no. 145/2007-01-13, p. 2.

of culture, which only communities devoid of complexes, creative and non-imitative, can afford.

The conflict, which arises from the will to resist evil in its original form, which is human (mental and physical) suffering, is the driving force of agonistic democracy: without the effort of those interested and the resistance to them of the social „matter” in the form of institutions, ossified or becoming so, which consolidate inequality, group interests, prejudices etc., it is impossible to implement the values of freedom and equality in their diverse (as we are ourselves) meanings and dimensions. Citizens of agonistic democracy assume that there is and will be evil in the world – but one should try to remedy it everywhere. *It is on this imperative that democratic politics rests upon: it is not confined to the voting and eligibility rights only; it is a social practice – a modus vivendi – of constantly solving or easing antagonisms, the causes and effects of injustice; it is an inclusive practice that includes all those who suffer injustice; it is the practice of nonconformity organized around the experience of freedom indicators.*

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The analysis of the pragmatic definition of democracy has demonstrated that it consists of the following three elements: 1) it is associated with the conception of symbolically constructed political identities, it is therefore a social practice, a culturally determined process; 2) the primary criterion for pragmatically constructing the social world is the experience of the evil (injustice expressed by freedom indicators) present in it, and disapproval of it – an attitude of eliminating or minimizing it; 3) a minimum understanding of the common good combines pragmatism with an esthetic approach: the point is the management of power relations that recognizes that the values of freedom and equality complement one another in the social world: therefore, the point is not to absolutize either of them but rather to balance them, which means in practice to limit domination, retain multiplicity and diversity, to prevent the weaker from being colonized (also in the social sphere) by the stronger, to seek compromise between them rather than rational agreement.

The problem of democracy in the present interpretation lies in combining difference and identity, i.e. *the universal with the particularistic*, or, to be more precise, it reads like this: *how to respect tradition and be pragmatic at the same time*, or, without giving up great values/narratives – freedom, equality, justice etc. – how to strive if not to eliminate then at least to ease concrete sufferings and social injustice. The morality of this project and its accompanying social devices is based, however, more on esthetic than cognitive criteria. Which is why it trusts experience more than the intellectual recognition of reality, built on a network of logically arranged concepts.

The point is that democracy entered the Polish political discourse overnight in the form of such a network of ideals – doctrines establishing the sense of the new reality. Their formal rationality acquired social and institutional shapes in the West (in different ways in different parts of it) over the last more or less three centuries. For that reason liberal democracy is a construction difficult to adjust to alien conditions, the more so if the goal is the success of the operation for the whole system, not only for some of its elements. The success of transformation is thus possible only with the involvement, and appropriate modification, of all assets that a community already has: traditional institutions and organizations of social and economic life. Poland's road to democracy did not take this course: the freedoms contained in liberal, economic and moral ideas became more attractive and useful to the elite – creators of the new state – than the democratic slogans/postulates of participation, equality and common good, closer to the Solidarity traditions. This dramatic imbalance of proportions between liberal and republican elements became and still is the main reason for the weakness and crisis of Polish democracy.

Tłum. Jerzy Adamko