

THE ROLE OF SOLIDARITY IN AN OPEN SOCIETY

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In 1989, Francis Fukuyama published a widely discussed article *The End of History?*, whose main ideas were developed three years later in a famous book entitled *The End of History and the Last Man*¹. The American philosopher argued that the fall of Communism in Eastern and Central Europe meant the death of history understood as Hegel's war of worldviews. From this perspective, the events of 1989 brought not only the end of the Cold War, but were first of all the victory of liberal democracy as the ultimate form of government*.

The diagnosis made by the author of *The End of History* proved to be essentially false on two points. Firstly, Fukuyama was wrong to announce the beginning of the rule of liberal democracy around the entire globe. We know very well the rule of totalitarian regimes continues in certain parts of the world until this very day, and it is a safe prediction democracy will not appear in many countries in the foreseeable future. Secondly, Fukuyama was not right to believe there existed no more history understood as a conflict of ideas. His words concerning the end of history sound particularly incredible after September 11, 2001, since the current social and political situation has been analyzed again in terms of a conflict of civilizations and war of cultures.

The fundamental thesis of *The End of History*, concerning the supremacy of liberal democracy, which in our civilization has never had any serious rivals, would be difficult to challenge, however. No other form of social and national life appears today to be equally good or just. In this sense, this regime is the crowning achievement of history: it may and should be improved, but it cannot be replaced with any better form.

1. Liberal Democracy and an Open Society

Liberal democracy can be defined as a regime in which people maximize such goods as freedom or self-government in the conditions of equality. Of course, there is no single definitive model of a liberal society today. Instead, we are dealing with a mosaic of various concepts, considerably differing from one another. Representatives of the

¹ Cf. FUKUYAMA, F.: *The End of History and the Last Man*. New York: Free Press, 1992.

various trends in liberalism (Ackerman, Dworkin, Larmore, Rawls) differ radically in their views on the meaning of freedom and self-government, and on the right kind of equality². Common for all concepts of liberalism is the emphasis on such categories as freedom, individualism, law-governed state, the principle of equality, or free market. It is important to notice that liberalism supports and protects individual freedom not because it is interested in what people do with their lives, but because it believes freedom is fundamental for good living.

In the 1990s, the political theory of liberalism experienced a renewal. More attention was paid, among other things, to the need for shaping social relations and looking for common goals which would organize the life of the nation or state as a community. This involved first of all a response of liberals to criticism from communitarianists (Bellah, MacIntyre, Sandel, Taylor). Communitarianism emerged at the end of the 1970s and the beginning of the 1980s, and its criticism of liberalism can be contained in four points. First, communitarianists criticize the individualist concept of a subject, typical of liberal thought. Second, they reject the notion of the neutrality of justice and institutions, and the supremacy of justice over good. Third, they criticize the central position of rights with respect to obligations. Fourth, they reject the liberal value of tolerance³. Communitarianists propagate the need for rediscovering the idea of community, and question the liberal model of living limited to respecting neutral rules of the game. Their criticism has had a considerable impact on the views of some theoreticians of liberalism.

In modern liberal democracy, the concept of an open society developed by Karl Popper is an important point of reference – not so much in the economical or political as in the moral and cultural dimension. It could be referred to as a proposal of a certain model of communal life developed on the foundation of liberal thought.

Publishing *The Open Society and Its Enemies* in 1945, Popper wanted to achieve two basic goals: first, he wanted to criticize the false view of social life proposed by Marxists; second, he intended to offer an alternative concept, which he called an open society⁴. An open society is the opposite of a closed society, closed by its claim on ultimate and unchanging truths, imposed also on those who do not share such convictions.

A closed society may be compared to an organism in which particular entities are bound together not only by such abstract social relations as the division of labour or distribution of goods, but also by the concrete, physical bondage of touch, smell and sight. A closed society is more like a herd or tribe. All kinds of utopias, for instance,

² Cf. DWORKIN, R.: *Wolność, równość, wspólnota*, in: MICHALSKI, K.: *Spoleczeństwo liberalne*. Kraków: SIW Znak, 1996, 59-86.

³ Cf. FERRARA, A.: *Comunitarismo e liberalismo*. Roma: Editori Riuniti, 1992, XII.

⁴ Cf. POPPER, K.: *Spoleczeństwo otwarte i jego wrogowie*. Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, 2006.

are closed societies. A magical, tribal, or collective society is a closed one, while a society in which an individual has the rights to make his or her own decisions is open⁵.

„The passage from a closed to an open society is the most profound revolution mankind has ever witnessed so far. Due to the biological nature of a closed society, this transformation has had to be experienced in a very profound way. When we say Western civilization has its roots in the Greek culture, we must clearly understand what it means: the Greeks initiated this great revolution, which appears still to be at its early stage, of transformation from a closed into an open society”⁶.

An open society is synonymous to the rather unfortunate name of “democracy”. Popper reminds us that the Athenians understood democracy as a state in which people were not subject to despotic rule. The essence of democracy consists in the idea of political freedom. Under despotic rule, which questions the sacred principle of freedom, we are terrorized and stripped of our humanity. Popper stresses, therefore, that the essence of a free and open society is neither the rule of majority, nor “absolute freedom”, but self-government. An open society is illustrated by the Athens of Pericles.

The idea of an open society is based on the conviction that our understanding is fallible and that we live in a world of a polytheism of values. Consequently, ethics cannot be understood as a science, as the values we recognize are mere propositions, the object of choices we make in our conscience. An open society is open to new values, new visions of the world, religious and moral convictions. There is no criterion to help us define what a perfect society should be like. Consequently, we have no arguments for imposing a particular model of communal life on others. We may only remain open to various proposals. Thus, a person determined in his or her moral convictions, who defends objective truth and questions the polytheism of values, may never be a good citizen of an open society. On this point Popper differs fundamentally from the proponents of classical liberalism, who postulated the need for strong moral and religious foundations in the public sphere.

2. Selective Liberalism

Some thinkers are of the opinion there has been no fundamental discussion of various concepts of liberal democracy in Eastern and Central Europe after 1989. Zdzisław Krasnodębski believes that post-communist countries took over certain ideas from the great wealth of liberal thought in a superficial and selective manner. In Poland, selective liberalism implemented as a model of communal life has included a certain number of distinctive elements – the idea of moral pluralism and the neutrality of the

⁵ Cf. JARVIE, I., PRALONG, S.: *Popper e La società aperta 50 anni dopo*. Roma: Armando, 2000.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 223-224.

state, the idea of fast modernization as the basic goal, distrust of and dislike for the national tradition, the prohibition of decommunization, etc. Selective liberalism proposed to privatize ethical norms and did not attach much significance to the issue of affirmatively shaping communal identity and memory.

“That new political philosophy,” Krasnodębski writes, “the philosophy of peripheral democracy, hampered the emergence of any rational discussion of the fundamental dilemmas facing post-communist societies of Eastern and Central Europe related to the formulation of collective goals, the role of value and ethos, the problem of collective identity, and the issue of methods and ways of overcoming the communist past”⁷. After 1989, not enough emphasis was put on democratic participation, unity and collective good, indeed, there was not enough respect for the individual and his rights.

Selective liberalism has equated democracy with liberalism, and liberalism with an open society. Selective liberalism approximates a synthesis of leftist and liberal thought. Such synthesis appears also in Western countries, but there it is marginal. The Polish model of liberalism, on the other hand, is its extreme version, lacking a number of essential elements, for example the idea of justice which for Rawls is fundamental. Selective liberalism is thus neither classical liberalism, which was never based on the idea of relativism or pluralism, nor political liberalism as understood by Rawls, where the idea of equality, justice and morality plays such an important role. For the author of *A Theory of Justice*, consent among citizens goes beyond the constitutional, purely legal framework – it is a moral consensus⁸.

3. Various Concepts of Solidarity

After 1989, Poland could have embraced the ethos of solidarity, developed on the foundations of the great national “Solidarity” movement, as a model of communal life alternative to selective liberalism. Krasnodębski believes the rejection of the ethos of solidarity and choice of selective liberalism instead was a great mistake, as it is the idea of solidarity that could now be a remedy for some of the diseases consuming contemporary post-communist societies and the societies of mature Western democracy. It appears, however, that not every concept of solidarity may provide a good basis for the ethos we are talking about. Thus, one should take a closer look at the history of solidarity and its various interpretations.

In the 19th century, the category of solidarity transferred from legal parlance to the sphere of philosophy. It started to replace the idea of Christian love, relating to such ideas as humanitarianism, philanthropy and social love. The first theoretician of

⁷ KRASNODEBSKI, Z.: *Demokracja peryferii*. Gdańsk: słowo/obraz terytoria, 2003, 19.

⁸ Cf. *ibid.*, 48.

solidarity was Emil Durkheim, who distinguished between mechanical solidarity which characterized primitive societies, and organic solidarity found in modern societies. Both types of solidarity were based on the idea of collective identity developed by human individuals.

In France, solidarity was treated as a new social rule defining relations between people on purely humanistic grounds. Consequently, for many years the Catholic circles on the Seine approached the notion of “Solidarity” with much reserve. The opposite situation, on the other hand, was found in Germany, where a system of solidarism developed from the idea of solidarity in the 19th century. It was a vision of a social system based on two principles: the idea of common good, and the Christian view of the human person. Solidarism was an attempt at striking a balance between the individual and the community in the context of the dispute between liberal thought and collectivist concepts.

Today, the word “solidarity” is often abused, which makes it lose its original meaning. In the philosophy of politics, more and more frequently it replaces such ideas as equality or social justice. One of the contemporary philosophical concepts of solidarity was developed by Richard Rorty, who called himself a postmodern bourgeois liberal. He believed we needed a liberal society, a society that would be open to words and persuasion, not to violence.

Rorty believed a liberal vision of social order could be based on any metaphysical premises. Instead of human nature, inherent human rights, or the idea of community we are only dealing with pragmatic values of liberal democracy. In Rorty’s opinion, social order should be based on three values in particular: tolerance, irony, and solidarity⁹. Tolerance is a mediatory element which acts as a go-between in the good functioning of a society made up of autonomous subjects. Irony is a critical approach to one’s own views and the convictions of others. Tolerance and irony open up to solidarity. The only possible bond is the universal human community justified by biology. From Rorty’s perspective, there existed an instinctive solidarity, much like empathy in the animal world.

Rorty’s concept could be referred to as negative solidarity¹⁰. Since there is no human nature, we cannot find a universal foundation which could serve as an objective justification for solidarity. It is a negative solidarity, as it is built not on the recognition of a uniting, common idea of humanity, but on the basis of evading pain and humiliation. Solidarity is the ability to overcome traditional (e.g. tribal or religious) differences between people. Rorty encourages us to extend the circle of people we feel solidarity with.

⁹ Cf. RORTY, R.: *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989.

¹⁰ Cf. SZAHAJ, A.: *Ironia i miłość. Neopragmatyzm Richarda Rorty’ego w kontekście sporu o postmodernizm*. Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego, 1996, 87-92.

Another contemporary concept of solidarity is found in the writings of Jürgen Habermas, who proposes a cosmopolitan solidarity. Habermas links the idea of solidarity with the theory of communicative action¹¹. Solidarity is created and constantly renewed in daily interactions of interpersonal communication. Bonds of solidarity are born out of a dialogue that is free of the desire for power and dominance. The basic question asked by Habermas is to do with globalization: will civic societies and the social sphere emerging on a supranational level develop an awareness of duty and cosmopolitan solidarity? A new order on our planet and a new distribution of goods is not possible without such kind of solidarity¹².

Habermas differentiates between civic and cosmopolitan solidarity. The first kind refers to ties between members of a particular political community who feel participants of the same project. This kind of solidarity has recently developed in most Western countries and joined other natural forms of man's faithfulness to his own family or place of origin. Civic solidarity emerges out of a new concept of collective identity built on the idea of a nation. This concept has made it possible to overcome various forms of natural solidarity (family, village), to arrive at a more abstract idea of solidarity which binds different people being part of the same nation. Even if they are strangers, members of the same nation feel responsible for one another and are capable of sacrifice for the sake of others. In western countries, civic solidarity is a long process of national identification on the foundations of culture, language, religion.

Cosmopolitan solidarity is something yet to be developed. Habermas believes it cannot be shaped on the foundations of a cosmopolitan identity. It cannot be based on some common idea of good, but only on the foundation of human rights vested in every individual. There is a certain problem with this idea, however – the concept of human rights is a manifestation of the Western cultural and political tradition and can hardly serve as foundations for a cosmopolitan identity. Moreover, the abstract nature of human rights does not appear to be a factor effectively motivating people to solidarity.

4. Solidarity and Personalism

A much different concept of solidarity is found in the thought of Tischner and Wojtyła. The former is the author of *Ethics of Solidarity*, a book written between the autumn of 1980 and the autumn of 1981 – during the peaceful revolution led by the “Solidarity” movement. Solidarity then became one of the big words (like freedom, independence, human dignity) shaping history. The book was intended as a

¹¹ HABERMAS, J.: *The Theory of Communicative Action*. London: Beacon Press, 1984.

¹² Cf. HABERMAS, J.: *The Postnational Constellation*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1998; STORANI, G.: *Sul concetto di solidarietà nel pensiero di Jürgen Habermas*, in VIGNA, C.: *Etiche e politiche della post-modernità*, Milano: Vita e Pensiero, 2003, 207-238.

philosophical commentary on the then contemporary events. At the time, solidarity was becoming a form of non-violent struggle. The ethics of solidarity is not a ready-made ethical theory; rather, it is a reflection which especially then cleared many of the basic concepts (dialogue, work, family, education, etc.) from Marxist influences, restoring their original meaning.

For Tischner, the idea of solidarity is found in the writings of St. Paul: “Bear one another’s burdens, and thereby fulfil the law of Christ” (Ga 6:2). This way the Christian character of solidarity and the workers’ protests of 1980 is emphasized. “What we are witnessing,” Tischner wrote, “is not only a social or economical event, but first of all an ethical one. It has to do with human dignity. The dignity of a man is based on his conscience. The deepest solidarity is the solidarity of conscience”¹³. Not every „us” and not every „together” means solidarity. Solidarity is the work of those who have a conscience. “The foundation of solidarity is conscience, and it is spurred to action by the call of a man hurt by another. Solidarity is a special kind of bondage between people: one person is bound to another to protect those who need to be protected”¹⁴.

After 1989, Tischner modifies his concept of the ethics of solidarity. He admits that his earlier analysis of solidarity had overlooked its need for roots. He says in new times the ethos of solidarity needs to be redefined with more insight. The idea of solidarity cannot be a standalone concept. It flows out of the underlying principle of the dignity of a human person. Tischner believes Karol Wojtyła was right to base solidarity on personalism. “In order to render the ethos of solidarity at a deeper level, indeed, to save it, it must be demonstrated that in it and through it our deepest respect for the person and his or her unalienable rights is expressed. We must relate that which is bound: personalism and solidarity, solidarity and personalism”¹⁵.

In the writings of Wojtyła, a discussion of solidarity appears in the context of an analysis of relations between man and community. Man as a person is a being in dialogue. Interdependence between people is not a sign of weakness or fragility, but an expression of the personal dimension. Consequently, solidarity has its roots in human nature. Wojtyła distinguishes four attitudes which are characteristic for action and existence “together with others”. Unauthentic attitudes are conformism and evasion, while authentic attitudes are solidarity and opposition.

„The attitudes of solidarity and opposition must be discussed together, as one is strictly necessary to understand the other. The attitude of solidarity is a ‘natural’ consequence of the fact man exists and acts together with others. It is also the basis for community, in which the common good rightly conditions and releases participation,

¹³ TISCHNER, J.: *Etyka solidarności oraz Homo sovieticus*. Kraków: Wydawnictwo Znak, 1992, 11-12.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 17.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 187.

and participation rightly serves the common good, supports it and fulfils. Solidarity means a permanent readiness to accept and realize one's share related to membership in a particular community"¹⁶. The attitude of solidarity is an expression of correct relation with the common good. When there is no common commitment to authentic attitudes, solidarity turns into conformism, and opposition into evasion.

Wojtyła continued his reflection on solidarity after he became John Paul II. He stressed that solidarity was undoubtedly a Christian virtue. Solidarity is „a firm and persevering determination to commit oneself to the common good; that is to say to the good of all and of each individual, because we are all really responsible for all"¹⁷. Solidarity as a moral and social attitude is a response to interdependence understood as a system which determines relations in the contemporary world in the economic, cultural, political and religious dimension. „The exercise of solidarity within each society is valid when its members recognize one another as persons"¹⁸. Solidarity helps us see another person not as an object, or an enemy, but as our equal. It encourages us to cooperate and commit ourselves to the common good. The principle of solidarity applies analogically to international relations. It leads to cooperation and a sense of responsibility for other nations. John Paul II believed the fruit of solidarity was peace.

5. Conclusion

Liberal democracy remains today the best of possible regimes, which is in need of continuous improvement. The weaknesses of liberal societies have been correctly diagnosed by communitarianists, as well as some others. It appears that the ethos of solidarity, which emphasizes the meaning of community, family, religion, or tradition, may be an effective remedy to extreme individualism and severed or weakened social relations in liberal societies. It is an ethos which is based on solidarity combined with a personalist view of man. In the personalist approach, solidarity is built on the recognition of a common, uniting idea of humanity. The ethos of solidarity points to the need for permanent moral and religious foundations in public life, thus challenging one of the essential elements of the concept of an open society as proposed by Popper.

This kind of ethos has had its beautiful expression in the “Solidarity” movement. Within its framework, a certain model of democracy developed spontaneously, called participating democracy. It is often understood as a form of democracy that is more developed than liberal democracy. In participating democracy, emphasis is put on ensuring the participation of the greatest possible number of people

¹⁶ WOJTYŁA, K.: *Osoba i czyn oraz inne studia antropologiczne*. Lublin: Towarzystwo Naukowe KUL, 2000, 323.

¹⁷ JOHN PAUL II: *Sollicitudo rei socialis*. Rome: Vatican Press, 1987, 38.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 39.

in the decision-making process, on active commitment to common work and common life. What we need today is not only a globalization of solidarity as an attitude, but also as an ethos. A model of collective existence based on the foundation of solidarity has its universal meaning and has its place in the contemporary discussion on the ways of improving contemporary liberal democracy.

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SUMMARY

Solidarity became one of the philosophical categories in the 19th century. Today it is often interpreted as one of the virtues which animate man's social life. The end of the 20th century was surely the period during which solidarity was spoken of the most. There is no doubt that it played a great role in the fall of communism in east central Europe. In Poland of the eighties of the last century, in comparison with the closed society of that time, Tischner tried to elaborate an ethic of solidarity.

The meaning of solidarity remains actual even today for the open society in which we live. It appears that, by introducing this category in the debate on the condition of today's society, one can expand and enrich the communitarian critique (Bellah, MacIntyre, Sandel, Taylor) towards contemporary liberalism (Ackerman, Dworkin, Larmore, Rawls). But in the context of an open society, solidarity interpreted from a modern or post-modern perspective (Habermas, Rorty) is not very useful, when solidarity is rooted in the personalistic principle (Tischner, Wojtyła).

* A. Kobyliński, *The Role of Solidarity in an Open Society*, in: P. Ivanic, M. Hetenyi (eds.), *Europske kontekty interkulturnej komunikacie*, Nitra 2009, p. 139-148.