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**The problem of good order.
Burke's and Tocqueville's tradition of the
criticism of modernity**

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Contemporary moviegoers are very familiar with prison dramas. These stories are exciting because the hero has to be brave and strong in the interest of justice and truth in a world where there is no law to implement justice. The ever-innocent hero in these stories finds himself in a world where there is no law, where force alone arranges human relations. Among prisoners there is no consensus, common sense, or intersubjective norms which could control the acts of individuals and decide their conflicts apart from life-and-death struggle. While the prisoners' world is so chaotic, it is also very strictly organized and conditioned by means of walls and iron cages, by detailed time-table and by the fact that their spatial moves are strictly regulated. However, this regulation is not carried out in a normative way, most of the imprisoned has never accepted these limitations. The walls and iron cages define illegitim conditions without necessitating any obedience or loyalty – the personal moral problem of obedience does not emerge concerning the walls and iron cages, they do not need justification. The walls and cages represent a kind of naked force for people they surround, and from their



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point of view these are arbitrary. These walls and cages are not legitimate among prisoners, in as much as they control people without reference to their normative-moral imagination, because the world of prisoners lacks any norms. This world is chaotic without a sense of justice and self-control, so the only effective controlling agencies for them cannot be legitimate for the controlled. In these stories there are two kinds of arbitrariness or forces: one among the prisoners, the other from outside (walls and fences), and the two create conditions of eternal chaotic struggle. Probably a good example for this paradox is the modern image of the market. On the one hand, people refer to it as a field of struggle among unlimited self-interests, where force – coming from economic talent – is the only relevant factor, but, on the other hand, market is seen as something that operates under strict, “objective” rules and laws which are independent of the righteousness or self-interest of agents.

Too much or too little control, and control in general, that is, the problem of order and freedom is one the oldest problems in social and political thinking. My supposition in this paper is that there is not only one kind of control – an idea opposed to the originally Whiggish view of modern history as progress in the direction of more freedom and less control. The paradoxical notion of too much control and too much freedom at the same time is rather modern, at least it is a paradox which became dominant in the critique of modernity after the French and industrial revolutions. Both events questioned the existing controls in social life and focused attention on the possibility of the re-creation of the wished new kinds of control. It has been widely referred to as the phenomenon of decline of religion, old and established customs, morality and authority. But even if the emergence of modernity created new problems, the answers were to be found in the traditional ideas and concepts.

The social paradox of Chaotic Prison seems to be the result of the demolition and evaporation of norms and laws as well as the adherence to them. This paradox, i.e. the coexistence of chaos and despotism, is rather typical in the



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criticism of modernity. The notion suggests that neither people nor governors are bound by any moral limits. Somehow, there is too much *liberoum arbitrium*, and, at the same time, it seems not to exist any more. Those thinkers who were sensitive only to one side of this paradox, wanted either liberation or order. According to these images there is chaos and anarchy or defencelessness, serfdom; the same world, however, is perceived as uniform, homogeneous, systematic and despotically controlled or manipulated.

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The origin of the image of Chaotic Prison can be found partly in Plato's texts and partly in the Exodus, two texts which are the sources of most of our common ideas. Plato did not really favour democracy, but he hated tyranny even more. His main criticism of democracy was that it resulted necessarily in tyranny. I will not try to provide a thorough-going analysis of Plato's text, rather turn to his description of democracy, where he points out such vices as money-minded thinking, uninhibited wishes, and the loss of the sense of moderation.

„And he lives on, yielding day by day to the desire at hand. At one time he drinks heavily to the accompaniment of the flute, at another he drinks only water and is wasting away; at one time he goes in for physical exercise, then again he does nothing and cares for nothing; at times he pretends to spend his time on philosophy; often he takes part in public affairs; he then leaps up from his seat and says and does whatever comes into his mind; and if he happens to admire military men, he is carried in that direction, if moneyed men, he turns to making money; there is no plan or discipline in his life but he calls it pleasant, free and blessed, and he follows it throughout his time”.¹

¹ Plato 1974, 561



„And you know that in the end they take no notice of the laws, written or unwritten, in order that there should in no sense be a master over them”.²

The „spirit of anarchy” and „exaggerated liberty” turn democracy necessarily into the serfdom of tyranny, *because people start to look for certainty*. Thus, limitlessness is connected to tyranny and serfdom; for Plato the two poles are opposite to each other only in logic, but not in social practice, which is not logical at all. Whilst in Plato’s description there is a chronological succession between chaos and tyranny, and both are connected to immorality, in the Exodus serfdom and unrighteousness exist together. Before the Exodus, the Jews lived in serfdom, they lived under the despotism of pharaohs. However, the Jews were morally corrupted, they had idols and foreign gods. The promise of Canaan was not only a promise of collective freedom, a life without serfdom, but also of a moral upgrading. Obedience to divine law liberates the people from unjust worldly power because by adhering to this law they find peace and harmony without any necessity for a system of coercion to ensure peaceful cooperation.

The two phenomena are connected – freedom and true morality, tyranny and immorality. In the *City of God* Augustine spread the idea in Christian thinking that, as a result of original sin, the lack of true faith and morality are necessarily connected to arbitrary power or coercion. (See bk. XIV and XIX) From the point of view of the present paper, this image of *civitas terrena* is highly important. In the *civitas terrena* the original sin results in vain, wilful, lustful and self-interested people who are necessarily in conflict with each other and only the arbitrary force of worldly magistrate may implement some, relative peace among people. Since there is no morality among people in the *civitas terrena*, this power is necessarily arbitrary from their point of view, and it cannot be morally legitimated. It is meaningless to think of morally conditioned power when people are an immoral

² Plato 1974, 563



mob. In this social setting the controlling agency cannot depend on the approval of immoral individuals. The citizens of the city of man, *civitas terrena*, can approve only sinful things, thus their control cannot and should not result from their will. In order that those corrupted individuals can coexist only a despotic power can control and oppress their licentiousness for the sake of relative peace. The solution is true faith and the love of God, which create real peace among people, and in this case – if man is obedient to God – people do not need any human control. The more people can live peacefully without outer controlling agency, the less they need a despotic power. It is an important point for us that in Augustine’s thinking there is only one kind of faith, one proper love. Sin and sinful self-love are not other kinds of human attitude, but the lack of the real and true one. Everything that exists is a creation of God, and God cannot be the creator of sins. So the *civitas terrena* is not another kind of society, another order, but the lack of order. There is only one type of order, the apolitical *civitas Dei*. So the world of chaotic wills and despotic power is not another order, but the absence of any social order. Perhaps, I do not have to emphasise how critical this Augustinian view of human world is. Its critical potency describes the normative image of the City of God as the only real order. In any other case, power is arbitrary, unjust and tyrannical, independent of any norms the subjects might have. The idea of *civitas terrena* is too close to the metaphore of the Chaotic Prison to suppose this similarity is merely accidental.

The paradox of Chaotic Prison was used rather often to criticize modernity, so this idea is not only normative, and therefore critical, but it is anti-modernist. Edmund Burke was one of the firsts who used this illuminating paradox to criticise emerging modernity, that is, the social results of the French revolution. For Burke the pre-modern/modern brake had a dramatic character. He characterized the French state and society (that is, the collapse of society in revolution) as a state in which there were too strong and unjust controls (the new ones) and the lack of controls (the old ones) of sinners.



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This paradoxical view was connected to his deep conviction that society and control cannot be created rationally, and that both social relations and control are non-rational. The effort of revolutionaries to reconstruct the human world only demolished it.³ Burke wrote that individual actions, behaviour became arbitrary, confused on the interpersonal level, therefore life was experienced as chaotic on this level; on the other hand, the government concentrated an enormous amount of power, but because of the lack of obedience, the government was able to control people only by means of the continuous presence of naked force. Such people were apt to break laws and rules as soon as the guards looked the other way. On the interpersonal level, people were immoral and wilful, and they did what they want. And the same mob attitude characterized the revolutionary government – it was not limited by the sense of divine law, governors did what they wanted. On both levels, force, coercion alone might organize human relations. There were too many rules and limits, but, at the same time, there were no rules and limits. From this point of view the question is not whether there is natural law or not; for Burke, the important point is that in former times people assumed that natural law existed and adjusted their actions to this supposed law which was embedded in tradition. So the natural law was taken for granted in tradition.

Burke refused the atheism of radicals as dangerous to society, because for him atheism was connected to amoral individualism. „In the mean time a system of French conspiracy is gaining ground in every country. This system happening to be founded on principles the most delusive indeed, but the most flattering to the natural propensities of the unthinking multitude... A predominant inclination towards it appears in all those who have no religion, when otherwise their disposition leads them to be advocated even for despotism”.⁴ In his description the radicals have a twofold character: they are amoral and they harm natural law because of their blind faith in their own reason, therefore they endanger the very

³ See Oakeshott's metaphore on the Tower of Babel, Oakeshott 1999.

⁴ Burke 1992, 237



existence of society. Revolutionary politics were over- and under-moralised: independent of and even in opposition to traditional morality and religion, and by eliminating traditional morality and life they eliminated the sources of obedience and the moral limits of power; at the same time, in its efforts to spread the perfect morality and religion, this politics represented a new kind of tyranny. Burke depicted the revolutionary politics and its results as anarchic and despotic at the same time. The consequence of a politics which aims to reconstruct society was not the creation of a new order or a new society, but rather the end of any society or order, and the end of freedom which supposed the existence of society and order. Therefore, „they [revolutionaries] have found their punishment in their success”.⁵ If power goes beyond the barrier, it overturns and destroys itself.⁶ Many „even in France, have been made sick of their theories by their very success in realizing them”.⁷

In the description of the new world there are two opposing categories: chaos and the lack of freedom. The new world is chaotic and despotic at the same time: „people at once in bondage and confusion”.⁸

This new world stems from the original sin: „It’s spirit lies deep in the corruptions of our common nature”.⁹ The rationalized state is both more and less efficient than the earlier state was. Only those people can be ruled who are apt to be obedient, and the means of revolution are not sufficient to form the habit of obedience. In Jacobinism, bonds cannot remain stable and certain, and amidst social and political uncertainty and limitlessness there is only one measure for everything: self-interest. „That what was done in France was a wild attempt to methodize anarchy; to perpetuate and fix disorder. That it was a foul, impious,

⁵ Burke 1987, 34

⁶ Burke 1992, 195

„the monster of a Commonwealth cannot possibly live - that at any rate the ill contrivance of their fabrick will make it fall in pieces of itself” (Burke 1992, 230)

⁷ Burke 1992, 115

⁸ Burke 1992, 54

⁹ Burke 1991, 265



monstrous thing, wholly out of the course of moral nature”.¹⁰ Violent politics is the only possible form of politics in chaos which is the very result of rational plan for social reconstruction.

The new world is not only chaotic but also despotic and violent, and these characteristics are much worse than in the case of any previous political power. According to Burke, after the revolution power remains in a new and irresponsible form, it is more violent, without limits.

*„It is to delude ourselves to consider the state of France, since their Revolution, as a state of Anarchy, it is something far worse. Anarchy it is, undoubtedly, if compared with Government pursuing the peace, order, morals and prosperity of the People. But regarding only the power, that has really guided from the day of the Revolution to this time, it has been of all Governments the most absolute, despotic and despotic, and effective, that has hitherto appeared on earth. Their state is not an Anarchy, but a series of short-lived Tyrannies.. France has no public; it is the only nation I ever heard of, where the people are absolutely slaves, in the fullest sense, in all affairs public and private, great and small, even down to the minutest and most recondite parts of their household concerns”.*¹¹

*„Individuality is left out of their scheme of Government. The state is all in all. Every thing is referred to the production of force; afterwards every thing is trusted to the use of it. It is military in it's principle, in it's maxims, in it's spirit, and in all it's movements. The state has dominion over minds by proselytism, over bodies by arms... France has, since the accomplishment of the Revolution, a complete unity in it's direction. It has destroyed every resource of the State, which depends upon opinion and the good-will of individuals. The riches of convention disappear... the command over what remains is complete and absolute”.*¹²

¹⁰ Burke 1992, 83

¹¹ Burke 1991, 87

¹² Burke 1991, 288



Revolutionary politics militarized political life by demanding greater sacrifices from citizens, referring to dangers, besieged situation and permanent state of emergency. This new power is „the display of inconsiderate and presumptuous, because unresisted and irresistible, authority”.¹³ This power does not win obedience from the affections of people but it forces them and is based on their fear.¹⁴

„Troops prevailed over the Citizens... Twenty thousand regular Troops garrison Paris. Thus a complete Military Government is formed. It has strength, and it may count on the stability of that kind of power. Every other ground of stability, but from military force and terror, is clean out of the question... The whole of their Government, in its origination, in its continuance, in all its actions, and in all its resources, is force; and nothing but force. A forced constitution, a forced election, a forced subsistence, a forced requisition of soldiers, a forced loan of money”.¹⁵

The common character of chaos and tyranny is that both are opposite to the recognition of divine, natural or any kinds of transcendental limits independent of the will of individuals. The evaporation of these limits creates chaos in everyday life, in the face-to-face relations and tyranny in public life. The only alternative to society based on customs, traditions, habits is a chaotic and rebellious one which is under the coercion of military power. „Kings will be tyrants from the policy when subjects are rebels from the principle”.¹⁶ A new tyranny emerges necessarily because, trying to reconstruct a new and perfect society, revolutionaries ruined the old one and melted people into a chaotic and turbulent mass. According to Burke, the result was not a new order, but the lack of

¹³ Burke 1987, 34

¹⁴ Burke 1992, 119

¹⁵ Burke 1991, 89-90

¹⁶ Burke 1987, 68



any order and society, where power is necessarily tyrannical, that is, outside the control of citizens. The „will to power” is the only motive of the mob as well as politicians, both groups are the same: they are without any sense of limits beyond their will. The radicals „will find themselves engaged in a civil war with those whose cause they maintain”.¹⁷

The paradoxical description of revolutionary France was connected in Burke’s case to a critique of rationalism. Rationalism is *per definitionem* in conflict with society, because the Cartesian *ratio* opposes existing traditions, prejudices, lifeworld, and political rationalism tries to transform the social setting in accordance with abstractions alien to existing society. The Humean critique of rationalism was widened by Burke, who emphasized that political rationalism not only eliminated existing society and obedience, but, in this way unintendedly, undermined its own normative power. The point was for him that there was only one kind of normative power and obedience, and they were rooted in tradition. Rationalism on the other hand hopes that control has other possible methods which differ from the normative one and require neither coercion nor obedience. However, Burke emphasized the vanity of this hope. The result of political rationalism is that when the institutions, traditions, religion, habits limiting and supporting the power at the same time demolished the only possible way of control is the limitless and uncontrollable force:

*„you have industriously destroyed all the opinions and prejudices and, as far as in you lay, all the instincts which support government. Therefore, the moment any difference arises between your National Assembly and any part of the nation, you must have recourse to force. Nothing else is left to you, or rather you have left nothing else to yourselves”.*¹⁸

¹⁷ Burke 1992, 92

¹⁸ Burke 1987, 194



„On the scheme of this barbarous philosophy, which is the offspring of cold hearts and muddy understandings, and which is as void of solid wisdom as it is destitute of all taste and elegance, laws are to be supported only by their own terrors and by the concern which each individual may find in them from his own private interests.. These public affections, combined with manners, are required sometimes as supplements, sometimes as correctives, always as aids to law”.¹⁹

The necessary result, originating from the nature of society, is not government but enforcement. Tradition is the the wisdom rooted in the ancestors' experience, so the wisdom embedded in tradition may inform about the long-term effects and side-effects of actions, therefore tradition limits the human mind and activity in terms of these effects not evident for socially and epistemologically atomized minds. This intersubjective wisdom is only partly conscious and not systematized, but they are „natural”, that is, tacit and taken for granted by their owners. Montaigne and Hume spread the notion of the importance of custom in social life, and Burke re-emphasized that the main characteristic of custom was its origin in the continuous past of social life. The significance of the concept of tradition-lifeworld was that it replaced the concept of sociability and sympathy as explanatory ideas of social life. The idea of tradition-lifeworld is inherently normative, critical: if sociability and sympathy are natural characteristics of human beings, it implies that people will live in society forever. But if social existence is a result of intersubjective, common knowledge rooted in the past, society will receive a normative meaning: non-historical society, any kind of plan to reconstruct society is meaningless and harmful to social existence. After the collapse of the tradition-lifeworld, the coexistence of human beings is still possible, but it is not society with its self-organizing and self-sustaining intersubjective meanings and normative order. The several descriptions of

¹⁹ Burke 1987, 68



modernity, whether they are critical or not, agree that tradition has been fading away, but on the other hand, a stronger and non-personal dependency and control is emerging. For Burke, tradition was not a formal notion, an eternal phenomenon, but rather a way of thinking and a form of human order that was highly valued and vis-à-vis the revolutionary world in France.

For Burke, order was an important condition of true freedom, but he thought that order of freedom that was consciously created rather than having emerged historically was impossible, and the experiment to create such order to be a monster, „an opinion at once new and persecuting is a monster”.²⁰ The order without historical precedent instituted by revolutionaries or rulers is *ab ovo* alien to people and therefore coercive. A new power is never limited, because it is new. However, limitation is not a value in itself, only the historically emerging and taken-for-granted normative limits are valuable. The intentionally introduced new controls and limits refer to *ratio* in opposition to existing tradition. And they are tyrannical because they do not acknowledge any limiting law or morality above themselves; the new power tries to create and introduce laws and morality, rather than to accommodate itself to the existing ones.

Chaos is seen as a result of the inefficient operation or the falsehood of the ordering principles of rationalist and/or democratic revolutionaries and social-engineers. Desintegration in any form was one of the hot subjects of the 19-20th century European thinking. But the interpretation of the new age – modernity – as crisis was not necessarily premodern. Even moderns – from Comte to Marx – saw their age in crisis.

The best follower of Burke was a continental author, Alexis de Tocqueville. Tocqueville depicted the same picture of Chaotic Prison in a somewhat different context. The Chaotic Prison for Tocqueville was not a consequence of the activity of sinful radicals, but the result of the necessary democratizing tendency in Western societies. Practically, Tocqueville was more

²⁰ Burke 1991, 467



pessimistic than his tutor, Edmund Burke, but both of them described modernity in a critical way by this paradoxical picture.

*„It cannot be absolutely or generally affirmed that the greatest danger of the present age is license or tyranny, anarchy or despotism. Both are equally to be feared; and the one may proceed as easily as the other from one and the same cause: namely, that **general apathy** which is the consequence of individualism”.*²¹

*„The principle of equality, which makes men independent of each other, gives them a habit and a taste for following in their private actions no other guide than their own will.. disorder must instantly reach its utmost pitch and that, every man drawing aside in a different direction, the fabric of society must at once crumble away.. For the principle of equality begets two tendencies: the one leads men straight to independence and may suddenly drive them into anarchy; the other conducts them by a longer, more secret, but more certain road to servitude”.*²²

The explanation of this sociodox is that people in democracy behave and think in the same way, same style, they become homogeneous, but nonetheless they remain unpredictable, heterogeneous and agitated in everyday life.

In Tocqueville's description, the American way of thinking is rationalist and individualist - individuals do not trust anybody. This „heterogeneous and agitated mass”²³ ruined tradition and authority, so these people – characterized by „envy, hatred, uncharitableness, pride and exaggerated self-confidence" – mistrust the judgement of one another. „Everyone then attempts to be his own sufficient guide... Thus that independence of mind which equality supposes to exist is never so great, never appears so excessive”.²⁴ This voluntarist individuality is connected

²¹ Tocqueville 1994, vol. II 370

²² Tocqueville 1994, vol. II 287-8

²³ Tocqueville 1994, vol. II. 58

²⁴ Tocqueville 1994, vol. II. 7



to the elimination of traditions and authority as well as to the tyranny of public opinion. For Tocqueville, as for Burke, tradition – containing the experience and wisdom of past generations – was somehow the embodiment of eternal law of God. So a rebel against tradition is also a rebel against God.

„What force can there be in the customs of a country which has changed, and is still perpetually changing, its aspect, in which every act of tyranny already has a precedent and every crime and example, on which there is nothing so old that its antiquity can save it from destruction, and nothing so unparalleled that its novelty can prevent it from being done?... What strength can even public opinion have retained when no twenty persons are connected by a common tie, when not a man, nor a family, nor chartered corporation, nor class, nor free institution, has the power of representing or exerting that opinion, and when every citizen, being equally weak, equally poor, and equally isolated, has only his personal importance to oppose to the organized force of the government?”²⁵

„In the age of equality all men are independent of each other, isolated, and weak”.²⁶

The loss of tradition is the loss of rules, limitations, and such loss results in unpredictable, that is, meaningless actions: „every man, at his own will and pleasure, forsakes one portion of his forefathers’ creed and retains another; so that, amid so many arbitrary measures, no common rule can ever be established, and it is almost impossible to predict which actions will be held in honor and which will be thought disgraceful”.²⁷ Democracy progresses amongst ruins that are its own creations, and it „constantly advanced *in the midst of the disorders* and

²⁵ Tocqueville 1994, vol. I. 328

²⁶ Tocqueville 1994, vol. II. 15

²⁷ Tocqueville 1994, vol. II 241



the agitations of a conflict... hence arises the *strange confusion*".²⁸ (Emphasis is added)

The chaotic effects of democracy strangely oppose Tocqueville's other, oft-quoted view of democracy in which the emphasis is on the tyranny of public opinion over individuals and on the homogeneity of individuals' mind. „It seems at first sight as if all the minds of the Americans were formed upon one model, so accurately do they follow the same route”.²⁹ Whilst every individual insists desperately on his freedom of thought, democracy makes it impossible by means of the equality of *life conditions*. Democracy controls individuals by these conditions and much less by normativity. „In democracy... all men are alike and do things pretty nearly alike... men and things are always changing, but it is monotonous because all these changes are alike”.³⁰ And „(I)t is the vehemence of their desires... perturbs their minds, but disciplines their lives”.³¹ For Tocqueville, the expressive, rebellious and romantic individual is not the alternative of the tyranny of democracy, but these are correlated phenomena, two sides of the sociodox of modern democracy. The problem with democracy is the lack of the sense of moral limits. It „may be asked what we have adopted in the place of those institutions, those ideas, and those customs of our forefathers which we have abandoned. The spell of royalty is broken, but it has not been succeeded by the majesty of the laws. The people have learned to despise all authority, but they still fear it, and fear now extorts more than was formerly paid from reverence and love... we have destroyed those individual powers which were able, single-handed, to cope with tyranny”.³² In the state of equality and equal weakness, force is seen by everyone as „the only argument for the present and the only guarantee for the future”.³³ Democracy is worse than what went before.

²⁸ Tocqueville 1994, vol. I. 11

²⁹ Tocqueville 1994, vol. I. 267

³⁰ Tocqueville 1994, vol. II. 228

³¹ Tocqueville 1994, vol. II. 229

³² Tocqueville 1994, vol. I. 10

³³ Tocqueville 1994, vol. I. 10



Of course, a lot of authors wrote about the elimination of good old rules, morality and the lack of any new ones in the present. The modernists typically hope that they can create or detect new rules, new morality or a new kind of social control in the place of traditional morality. But, on the other hand, since Hume and Burke, we have become familiar with the notion that mind, tradition, lifeworld cannot be created rationally and intentionally. These important phenomena of social life are unintended results of the activity of many people and generations, and if there is an intention behind their emergence, it is the „invisible hand” of Providence.

After all, democracy can exist in America, because – besides the republican effects of self-governing townships – there is a common religion limiting individuals from inside. Religion supports democracy by means of the limitation of thinking. However, these limits are not whimsical, according to Tocqueville, but true, whilst the forced limits of public opinion over the individual mind are arbitrary and against freedom. „Thus, while the law permits the Americans to do what they please, religion prevents them from conceiving, and forbids them to commit, what is rash or unjust”.³⁴ Liberty especially needs religion, because in despotism there is a political control, but in a free society political control help and limited at the same time by religious morality from inside. „Religion is much more necessary in the republic which they set forth in glowing colors than in the monarchy which they attack; it is more needed in democratic republic than in any others. How it is possible that society should escape destruction if the moral tie is not strengthened in proportion as the political tie is relaxed?”³⁵ As in Biblical thinking, man has to be obedient to God (as in Paradise) or to another man. Liberty and order can exist side by side, if (the true) religious morality governs individuals. But if this morality evaporates, public opinion and bureaucracy will replace it, and there will be too much control from

³⁴ Tocqueville 1994, vol. I. 305

³⁵ Tocqueville 1994, vol. I. 307



without and too little order, too much liberty and the absence of liberty at the same time. „But what now remains of those barriers which formerly arrested tyranny? Since religion has lost its empire over the souls of men, the most prominent boundary that divided good from evil is overthrown everything seems doubtful and indeterminate in the moral worlds; kings and nations are guided by chance, and none can say where are the natural limits of despotism and bounds of licence”.³⁶ Later on, he continued: „I doubt whether man can ever support at the same time complete religious independence and entire political freedom. And I am inclined to think that if faith be wanting in him, he must be subject; and if he be free, he must believe”.³⁷

It is worth recalling Augustine: only true faith and love can liberate man from serfdom and the rule of other men; whilst the erroneous love and its product, self-love necessarily brings about the domination of man over man. In democracy, neither the government, nor people are obedient to eternal moral laws, that is why they are voluntarist without any sense of limits, thus, government is despotic, while people’s lives are chaotic. The life is without freedom and order. The evaporation of Christian religion, and with it, the evaporation of tradition and customs, means the elimination of any intersubjectivity: the individual stays alone. „Thus not only does democracy make every man forget his ancestors, but it hides his descendants and separates his contemporaries from him; it throws him back forever upon himself alone and threatens in the end to confine him entirely within the solitude of his own heart”.³⁸ Despotism, just like democracy, goes together with atomisation of society and the absence of a common lifeworld.

„Despotism, which by its nature is suspicious, sees in the separation among men the surest guarantee of its continuance, and it usually makes every effort to keep them separate. No vice of human heart is so acceptable to it as selfishness... Thus the vices which despotism produces are precisely

³⁶ Tocqueville 1994, vol. I. 327

³⁷ Tocqueville 1994, vol. II. 22

³⁸ Tocqueville 1994, vol. II. 99



*those which equality fosters. These two things perniciously complete and assist each other. Equality places men side by side, **unconnected by any common tie**; despotism raises barriers to keep them asunder; the former predisposes them not to consider their fellow creatures, the latter makes general indifference a sort of public virtue”.*³⁹ (Emphasis is added)

Despotism is particularly dangerous in the age of democracy, because democracy by nature tends to eliminate common morality and, by doing so, to bring about the condition of despotism; while despots try to do the same intentionally. The closer the members of a democracy are to the citizen of *civitas terrena*, the more despotic democracy becomes. The lack of common morality brings about chaos, unpredictability in everyday life which makes the people of democracy give more and more power to government and administration in order to somehow cope with and regulate the unbearable chaos: „the dread of disturbance and the love of well-being insensibly lead democratic nations to increase the functions of central government as the only power which appears to be intrinsically sufficiently strong, enlightened, and secure to protect them from anarchy”.⁴⁰

Therefore, one form of democratic despotism is the above mentioned public opinion; the other one is bureaucracy. „It is easy to foresee that time is drawing near when man will be less and less able to produce, by himself alone, the commonest necessities of life. The task of the governing power will therefore perpetually increase, and its very efforts will extend it every day. The more it stands in the place of associations, the more will individuals, losing the notion of combining together, require its assistance: these are causes and effects that unceasingly create each other”.⁴¹ The numberless particular mind can never result public good and order, so they have to be implemented from without by

³⁹ Tocqueville 1994, vol. II. 102

⁴⁰ Tocqueville 1994, vol. II. 301

⁴¹ Tocqueville 1994, vol. II. 108



bureaucrats. The individual in a democracy „exists only in himself and for himself alone... Above this race of men stands an immense and tutelary power, which takes upon itself alone to secure their gratifications and to watch over their fate. This power is absolute, minute, regular, provident and mild... For their happiness such a government willingly labors, but it chooses to be the sole agent and the only arbiter of that happiness; it provides for their security, foresees and supplies their necessities, facilitates their pleasures, manages their principal concerns, directs their industry... what remains, but to spare them all the care of thinking and all the trouble of living”.⁴² Like Burke and unlike the modernists, the new kinds of control, limitation did not fire Tocqueville with enthusiasm, rather they terrified him. For Tocqueville, the alternative of the despotism of public opinion and benevolent bureaucracy was not the romantic, unbounded, expressive individual, but the one who is regulated by the common Christian religion and customs.

The important point in Tocqueville’s description is the danger of bureaucracy. (Since Max Weber, the danger of a new kind of despotism originating from bureaucracy has been a commonplace in social thinking. But this problem was not realised by 19th century liberals who hoped that societal progress of could be achieved by the benevolent social engineering of bureaucrats. J. S. Mill typically did not worry about new kinds of dependency and bureaucracy, but trusted its enlightened and enlightening power.) It is worth pointing out that Tocqueville, Carlyle, and later Weber saw the essence of the new kinds of power of bureaucracy in the creation and the limitation of life conditions by restricting alternatives, which is opposite to the old-fashioned normative rules and authority.

But much as the mass, containing atomized and self-loving individuals, needs the benevolent power of bureaucracy, these individuals are not obedient even to them, because the common religion and customs which used to create the habit of obedience has disappeared. „They are naturally impatient of regulation, and they are wearied by the permanence even of the condition they themselves

⁴² Tocqueville 1994, vol. II. 318



prefer”.⁴³ And „this same temper, carried with them into political life, renders them hostile to forms, which perpetually retard or arrest them in some of their projects”.⁴⁴ This kind of man „*perpetually oscillates between servitude and licence*”.⁴⁵ (Emphasis is added) This kind of people, lacking the habit of obedience and the sense of normativity, need a new kind of control, which is conditional, factual, and not normative, as Saint-Simon, Engels and Lenin named it, with utopical tone, the administration of things.⁴⁶ “Replacing the government of persons by the administration of things” became a dominant idea among the Moderns, describing the withering away of the state and the emerging promised land of non-authoritative order.⁴⁷ But the administration of things was experienced by many people not as liberation from the state authority, but as the reification of people under the irresistible power of state.

If individuals are not embedded in intersubjective relations any more – that is, if they have fallen out of the governing and limiting tradition which was a stock of the experience of previous generations – society either collapses as such, or else it receives a new meaning. And indeed, the meaning of society in modernist thinking differs from that in the thought of critics of modernity. The elimination of customs and tradition-lifeworld goes hand in hand with licentiousness and ungovernability, because the elimination of tradition-lifeworld means the elimination of normative limits of individuals from within. Thus, this social change has resulted in the self-loving, conflictual citizen of *civitas terrena* who does not acknowledge any limits above himself.

The Moderns tended to understand society in term of the Newtonian science, as something containing objective and unchangeable laws and facts. The

⁴³ Tocqueville 1994, vol. II. 330

⁴⁴ Tocqueville 1994, vol. II. 326

⁴⁵ Tocqueville 1994, vol. I. 93

⁴⁶ Bloom, 1946, Adamiak, 1970, Vernon, 1984

⁴⁷ As Raymond Aron wrote: “the totalitarian regimes of the twentieth century have shown that if there is one false notion it is that the administration of things can replace the government of people. It has emerged very clearly that if you want to administer all objects you must control all individuals at the same time”. Aron 2003. 175.



laws of society (or of human nature) presupposed that human beings are unchanged, the history or the accumulation of experience does not important at all. Revolutionary thinking – whether rebels or bureaucratic experts – might hope to restart human history and creating the final society embracing emancipated and prosperous people because they claimed to have the knowledge of these laws which supersede historical experiences. By the careful study of the existing artificial and unjust society, the Modern hoped to discover the laws of society. By means of these alleged laws the Moderns would have been created the permanently accessible natural society, universal and eternal and rather utopical, combining moral and political happiness. Because of this knowledge every generation may begin the world over again to attempt the natural society.

The Newtonian science interpreted the world as containing acting forces – so occult as the „gravitation”⁴⁸ – and facts, which can be described by rational laws and set boundaries for human actions. The rational knowledge may use these forces and facts, but no-one can eliminate them. Freedom is possible among them – that is why Max Weber used the metaphore of „iron cage” for the rational bureaucratic rule. This view was so widespread already in time of Burke, that his friend, Adam Smith criticized its engineering “highest degree of arrogance” years before Burke.⁴⁹

Burke, Tocqueville and others emphasized that authority did cease in modernity, while a new kind of power emerged which seems to be greater. In this new situation, similarly to individuals, power seems to be arbitrary, even if it refers to an universal rationality. The „bureaucratic individualism results in their characteristic overt political debates being between an individualism which makes its claim in terms of rights and forms of bureaucratic organization which made

⁴⁸ See Francis A. Yates 2002

⁴⁹ The man of system „seems to imagine that he can arrange the different members of great society with as much ease as the hand arranges the different pieces upon a chess-board. He does not consider that the pieces upon a chess-board have no other principle of motion besides that which the hand impresses upon them; but that, int he great chess-board of human society, every single piece has a principle of motion of its own, altogether different from that which the legislature might chuse ti impress upon it.” A. Smith 1984. VI.ii.2.17.



their claims in terms of utility... The mock rationality of the debate conceals the arbitrariness of the will and power at work in its resolution.” (MacIntyre 1985, 71) Arbitrariness means arbitrariness from the point of view of the intersubjective, common sense, habitual morality, i.e. unreasonable; rationalism, as any tyrannical, is meaningless in terms of tradition-lifeworld. Even the benevolent power, just like every individual decision, is necessarily arbitrary because of the lack of common and habitual morality.

Beside Tocqueville, Carlyle was another important follower of Burke’s image of the Chaotic Prison. Unlike Tocqueville, Carlyle was romantic, but both of them continued Burke’s critical view of modernity. Let us remember that in Tocqueville’s case modern despotism was not connected to the government, but to impersonal life-conditions and the bureaucracy controlling or at least influencing them. When these authors used the image of Chaotic Prison, they spoke about too much and too little control, they referred to the elimination of old controls and to the emerging new ones, respectively. In connection with the notion of too much control, Tocqueville mentioned new kinds of control – mass opinion and administration –, which, due to their newness, is an alien form. When he depicted the weak control over individuals, he referred to the taken-for-granted norms limiting their ambitions.

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Traditionally, the problems of control and rule are parts of natural law thinking. As early as Hooker, we can find two interpretations of the law of nature: it could mean normative rules (like the ability to realise right and wrong), and it could also mean „factual”, non-normative necessities originating from the nature of things. While normative/moral laws can be broken by rulers – and, in this case, they become tyrants –, factual or “objective” laws cannot be broken or any lawbreaking necessarily results harmful consequences. Burke identified tradition



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with the normative laws of nature, and for him it was important that the normative laws of nature made social life and liberty possible.

During modernity the notion of factual social laws and the search for them became increasingly popular. The emerging social science at the beginning of the 19th century undermined the notion of normative laws of nature, whilst it emphasized the importance of factual social laws. Whilst normative laws were increasingly interpreted as human creation, arbitrary convention or even ideology, false consciousness, the allegedly rational or rationally found factual social laws were seen as certain, universal, necessary and beneficially pointing towards human progress in any sense. The latter ones could explain unintended social phenomena, and the emerging social science increasingly hoped to acquire the knowledge of these laws in order to create a developed society, to control the human progress for sake of all. This way of thinking was connected to the progressivist movement which hoped to eliminate old normative – “oppressive” – controls and to create new and liberated society by means of new norms (New Christianity, Religion of Humanity, etc.) and/or factual social laws.

This kind of “hidden hand” explanation originated from the search for causes. The notion of order of tradition-lifeworld was succeeded by the notion of the system of mutual and causal dependence, and the notion of historical evolutionary formation of the tradition-lifeworld was succeeded by the notion of causal, necessary processes and trends: „Order is nothing but necessity... connected chain of causes and effects” – wrote d’Holbach.⁵⁰ In this notion of society, it is a network of impersonal, unchangeable and covert necessities, causal relations. None of the motions man underwent was spontaneous or free, these were dependent on causes, wholly out of the reach of his own powers. Man „is continually impelled by causes, which, in spite of himself, influence his frame, modify his existence, despite of his conduct... every movement of his duration, he

⁵⁰ d’Holbach 1984 vol. I. 63



was nothing more than a *passive instrument in the hands of necessity*”.⁵¹ (Emphasis is added) This argument of causal-functional necessities, based on the notion of factual laws inherent in social life, was related to utilitarian and instrumental meanings in d’Holbach’s case. The original program of 18-19th century rationalism was to discover these factual social laws in order to create a new and final moral order on their basis. The emerging social science did not enjoy the sense of chaos, but was terrified by it and tried to cope rationally with chaos. The Modernists can be differentiated from their critics by means of their optimistic view: both of these groups sensed some chaos and the erosion of taken-for-granted traditional morality and institutional order, but the Modernists had strong hopes for a new and better society resulting from the scientific control. As d’Holbach wrote: „Nevertheless, confusion... is nothing but the passage of a being into a new order”.⁵² The Modernists have tried to create a new order which would be based on the necessities operating in society. „Morality... ought to possess stability; to be at all times the same, for all the individuals of the human race; it ought neither to vary in one country, nor in one age from another... we must take for the basis of morality the necessity of things”.⁵³

The opinion that the virtue of people is not a precondition of order and what is more the useful action, serving public welfare and prosperity, in this world are against the inherited morality spread slowly, but it had an evident liberating effect: responsibility, duty or intention in general, are meaningless concepts in a mechanism – in the contemporary language: structure – run by impersonal causes. From the notion of Providence and unintended consequences the image of amoral human world emerged, what can be known and dominated by modern sciences as sociology, economics, etc. This amoralizing discourse was built around the metaphore of mechanism, liberating the common people and their governors from

⁵¹ d’Holbach 1984 vol. I. 81-2

⁵² d’Holbach 1984 vol. I. 67

⁵³ d’Holbach 1984 vol. III. 91



responsibility.⁵⁴ Therefore, this amoralizing social scientific thinking has elective affinity with modern mass democracy. This metaphor presupposes moral equality of people, therefore there are no *aristoi*, and there is not even need for them. Virtue and character are not important at all, because of the impersonal nature of human order and progress.

The Modernist, liberal as well as leftist thinkers preferred the factual social and allegedly natural laws to traditional morality involving *forum externum* and *internum*; they thought it was possible to organise a society where control was exercised mainly by factual social law – the administration of things –, where the necessities of impersonal social laws would replace obedience and traditional conventional normativity. This hope for this new kind of knowledge of these laws and of control supported the millenarian hope for the withering away of state. Social laws allow allegedly impersonal and non-arbitrary control instead of normative rules. While normative control works in terms of right-wrong, meaningful-meaningless, this impersonal control works in terms of effective-ineffective adaptation (useful-useless).

In the 19th century, sociology was a moral science, as in the case of J.S.Mill and Durkheim, and one of its basic problems was the experience of anomie, that is, the collapse of traditional morality and authorities, controls from within and without. This experience of chaos was labelled by Durkheim as anomie. It was connected to the search for „objective” or factual social laws which could explain unintended social phenomena and which were thought to offer the most effective methods of control apart from the intentions (traditional morality or anomie) of the members of society. „Objectivity” became one of the most important characteristics of these social laws, because „objectivity” means that these laws are out of the scope of human will. These laws can be used by social engineers, but nobody is able to resist their force. Therefore these laws are more convenient means for governors than normative rules and orders, because

⁵⁴ Ezrahi 1995



the latter ones allow alterations, disobedience, whilst the so-called “objective social laws” do not carry the problems of obedience and justification. Modernists suggested these laws because of their marvellous efficiency in social control. Somehow, the more emphasis was added to these “objective social laws” in social thinking, the more sceptical social scientists became about the normative interpretation of the law of nature and traditional morality. This modern ideal of control can be well seen in Rousseau’s *Emil*:

„There are *two kinds of dependence: dependence on things*, which is the work of nature; and *dependence on men*, which is the work of society. Dependence on things, being *non-moral*, does no injury to liberty and begets no vices; dependence on men, being out of order, gives rise to every kinds of vice, and thorough this master and slave become mutually depraved. If there is any cure for this social evil, it is to be found in the substitution of law for the individual; in arming the general will with a real strength beyond the power of any individual will. If the laws of nations, like the laws of nature could never be broken by any human power, dependence on men would become dependence on things; all the advantages of a state of nature would be combined with all the advantages of social life in the commonwealth. The liberty which preserves a man from vice would be united with the morality which raises him to virtue. Keep the child dependent on things only... *Let his unreasonable wishes meet with physical obstacles only, or the punishment_which results from his own actions, lessons which will be recalled when the same circumstances occur again*. It is enough to *prevent him from wrong doing without forbidding him to do wrong*”.⁵⁵ (emphasis is added)

It is easy to see the advantage of this sort of control: in the case of control by means of objective social laws there is no more personal domination and

⁵⁵ Rousseau 1974, 49



dependence, and together with this, the problem of obedience also ceases. In the emerging situation, there is no need for normative legitimation any more, because this control is not normative, but factual. It is impossible to rebel against or deviate from these laws, therefore obedience and justification are not questions any more. The use of these social laws for control - when „things”, that is „objective” condition controls human actions – can veil the necessary arbitrariness of power. The advantage of this sort of control is its more effective, impersonal and non-normative nature. These characteristics (1) can put aside the problem of normative legitimation, and (2) may allow any kind of individual morality, therefore modernist hoped emancipatory effects from this ideal of control. This control liberates government as well as individuals from moral bounds: the individual may think and live as he wants, and benevolent rational bureaucracy may also act as it find it fitting. In this case governmental activity does not claim any moral support from citizens, as it can work effectively without a legitimating moral consensus. „The very words *obey* and *command* will be excluded from his vocabulary, still more those of *duty* and *obligation*; but the words strength, necessity, weakness, and constraint must have a large place in it”.⁵⁶ The control based on factual social laws is recommended for the government in modernity partly because of its efficiency, and partly because this kind of control is not bound normatively by any existing morality and is able to work even without taking them into consideration. Thus, the emergence of this sort of control may be interpreted as a liberation, because it does not need any kind of virtue or common moral behaviour of citizens, and furthermore, this kind of control is supposed to be able to reform and improve society, because it can work effectively without the intentional moral support of people.

Rousseau’s view and hope became rather widespread in 19th century social theories. These theories characterised modernity by the impersonal, factual, „objective” non-moral laws and necessities coming from them. As Simmel wrote,

⁵⁶ Rousseau 1974, 53



hierarchical order and dependence exist in modernity with a sense of moral liberation: „superordination and subordination are quite indispensable means of organization and their disappearance would destroy one of the most fruitful forms of social production. It is thus our task to preserve superordination and subordination as long as they have these positive consequences, while at the same time eliminating those psychological consequences that make such relationships abhorrent. This goal is clearly approached to the extent to which all superordination and subordination become merely technical forms of organization, the purely objective character of which no longer evokes any subjective reactions”.⁵⁷ During the 19th and 20th centuries, social relations have been increasingly interpreted as factual laws and necessities, determinations. Whether the significance of this kind of relationship or its recognition has grown is an important question, however, it lies outside the scope of the present paper. Their attitude towards these factual, impersonal and immoral social necessities differentiates modernist thinkers from those who are critical of modernity. Modernists have interpreted these relations as liberating processes which might create a new society that combines freedom and order, accountability, predictability. In this context, order was followed by system, and freedom was pushed back into private life. In modernist thinking, these factual necessities advance the increase of individual freedom. „If the notion of the personality as counterpart and correlate must grow in equal measure to that of objectivity, then it becomes clear from this connection that a stricter evolution of concepts of objectivity and of individual freedom go hand in hand... on the one hand the laws of nature, the material order of things, the objective necessity of events emerge more clearly and distinctly, while on the other we see the emphasis upon the independent individuality, upon personal freedom, upon independence in relation

⁵⁷ Simmel 1990, 336



to all external and natural forces becoming more and more acute and increasingly stronger”.⁵⁸

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What the 18th century optimists hoped, the 19th-20th century people worried. There was a critical and anxious interpretation of the same experience of emerging modernity. In Carlyle's description, the image of chaos in everyday life and that of impersonal necessities received a rather different colouring. Together with romanticism, he picked up the line of Burke's critique of rationalism. Chaos and the necessary tendencies of impersonal despotism were interpreted by Burke, as well as Carlyle, as the results of spreading rationalism and the experiment to create rationally a new society. In this interpretation, means-end rationality is both a sign and a means of the new sort of impersonal and despotic control: „we should be tempted to call it (present age), not an Heroic, Devotional, Philosophical, or Moral Age, but above all others, the Mechanical Age. It is the Age of Machinery, in every outward and inward sense of that word; the age which, with its whole undivided might, forwards, teaches and practices the great art of adapting means to ends”.⁵⁹ This way of thinking was thought to be the most dangerous in politics, where it was becoming increasingly dominant. In a society which works like or is thought of as a mechanism, a machine, men „are to be guided only by their self-interests” and „the faith, hope and practice of every one founded on Mechanism of one kind of other”.⁶⁰ This society is and is seen by its members to be a great wheel with necessary rotations.

Carlyle was frightened by the “objective social laws” social thinking had just revealed, because these could take freedom – *liberum arbitrium* – away. „For it is the ‘force of circumstances’ that does everything; the force of one man can do

⁵⁸ Simmel 1990, 302

⁵⁹ Carlyle 1869, 317

⁶⁰ Carlyle 1869, 326



nothing... We figure Society as a ‘Machine’”.⁶¹ In Carlyle’s thinking, the instrumental and calculating rationality was connected to the notion of impersonal, factual necessities, dominating people. It is not too hard to notice the impact of Carlyle’s criticism of the „steamengine Utilitarianism”⁶² on Weber’s famous metaphor of the iron cage of bureaucratic rationality. „If *Mechanism, like some glass bell, encircles and imprisons us*”.⁶³ (emphasis is added) For Carlyle, on the one hand, mechanism meant the organizations and relations based on instrumental, calculating rationality, which relations and type of institutions flooded even religious life, but mainly politics; on the other hand, it meant a notion of society characterized by impersonal factual, “objective” necessities against the individual. He saw the man of his age as a cripple who needed the help of mechanisms, and, exactly because of this help, this man could be controlled by the developing life-conditions determined by mechanisms. As opposed to him, modernists were enthusiastic about the possibility of reconstructing society by means of these factual social necessities, because they thought these factual, “objective” necessities to be much more effective than moral control. Furthermore, modernist regarded factual laws to be liberating, because these laws were amoral, that is, they could work without any moral support. They operated as „invisible hands” without any intentional or moral support from the members of society. This state of social life filled romanticism with anxiety.

As earlier Adam Smith, Carlyle advocated social order against social system. Whilst Carlyle typically connected the experience of too much control, which originated from the use of factual, amoral and “objective” social laws and necessities, to instrumental, utilitarian rationality. He described the chaotic state of his age as a result of the elimination of a commonly shared and taken-for-granted, and in this sense „natural”, morality in interpersonal relations. The sense of a chaotic, unarranged and disorganized condition of interpersonal appeared on

⁶¹ Carlyle 1869, 334

⁶² Carlyle 1897, 172

⁶³ Carlyle 1869, 340



the interpersonal level. „Things... are growing disobedient to man... no man feels himself safe or satisfied”.⁶⁴ And „that waste chaos of Authorship by trade, that waste chaos of Scepticism in religion and politics, in life-theory and life-practice”.⁶⁵ He links chaos to a certain type of man, to a „sort of heart, from which, and to which, all other confusion circulates in the world”.⁶⁶ It is hard not to notice the reference to Augustine’s *civitas terrena* which is a result of a type of man characterized by a particular type of intention (self-love, disobedience and *libido dominandi*).

The sense of chaos or anomie has been, and still is rather general. However, in this tradition of the critique of modernity, chaos is not the necessary concomitant of the transition to modern society, but is seen as a collapse of society, because this tradition holds that only one form of society to be possible: the society based on common tradition-lifeworld. Just as in Augustine's case, for whom there was only one possible real order: the one that came from God; in his negative theology, nothing could exist without God’s intention. Sin is simply the lack of right action, so there is no such thing as an anomic social order: anomie is the absence of social order. The „chaotic, ungoverned, of Devil, not of God”.⁶⁷ „Unnature, what we call Chaos, holds nothing in it but vacuities, devouring gulfs”.⁶⁸ Following this view, modernity is not a new and different kind of society, but the lack of any social order (even if it exists a social system), because it is without the traditional lifeworld which contained God’s moral laws. There is no modern morality, thus there is no other possible way of social relations that merit the label of “society”: „we have departed far away from the laws of this Universe, and behold now lawless Chaos and inane Chimera is ready to devour us!”⁶⁹ In Carlyle’s case, as in Burke’s or Tocqueville’s case, the sense of chaos

⁶⁴ Carlyle 1919, 6

⁶⁵ Carlyle 1897, 184

⁶⁶ Carlyle 1897, 158

⁶⁷ Carlyle 1919, 85

⁶⁸ Carlyle 1919, 137

⁶⁹ Carlyle 1919, 28



went hand in hand with the sense of too much control. His age was depicted as „nothing but Mechanism and Chaotic Brute-Gods”.⁷⁰

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However, this critique of modernity, the view of chaotic prison, is not typical only among our ancestors, it is rather general in contemporary social thinking, as well. I would like to illustrate this view by citing just two examples from two different kinds of thinking.

In MacIntyre’s case the sociodox of Chaotic Prison is rather clear. On the one hand, he often refers to the moral disorder, „the disorders of moral thought and practice”,⁷¹ as something that goes together with „private arbitrariness”.⁷² He called the type of man characterising this disorder as „emotivist”, which means that there are no interpersonal moral criteria, standards of justice, generosity and duty. „The specifically modern self, the self that I have called emotivist, finds no limits set to that on which it may pass judgement... the emotivist self lack any such criteria”.⁷³

„Whatever criteria or principles or evaluative allegiances the emotivist self may profess, they are to be constructed as expression of attitudes, preferences and choices which are themselves not governed by criterion, principles and choices which are themselves not governed by criterion, principle or value... the emotivist self can have no rational history in its transition from one state of moral commitment to another... It is a self with no given continuities”.⁷⁴

The emotivist self does not acknowledge any intersubjective criteria, common measure, or limits above the individual whimsical wishes, and regards

⁷⁰ Carlyle 1919, 231

⁷¹ MacIntyre 1985, 2

⁷² MacIntyre 1985, 8

⁷³ MacIntyre 1985, 31

⁷⁴ MacIntyre 1985, 33



society to be simply a field of struggle of random wills. But this modern man doesn't seem to be too modern, at all. It takes after Plato's depiction the Epicurean Callicles in the *Gorgias*.⁷⁵

MacIntyre's anti-hero is Max Weber, in whose thinking the endless struggle and incomparativity characterise the world of values, which determines the goals of human actions, and there is only one kind of intersubjective criteria: the efficiency of rational bureaucracy, that is, the utilitarian effectivity in terms of means and ends. That is why MacIntyre describes modernity as bureaucratic individualism which means unpredictability on the interpersonal level, in lifeworld, and strict predictability on the level of bureaucratic planning and control of society at large, that is, on the level of administration of things. The typical man in modernity is expressivist. He places his critique of modernity - where the processes of moral-epistemological democratization (everyone has the right to create the categories of right and wrong) and elitism (some experts with qualifications and methods have the right and duty to organize other members of the society in terms of their administrative-technical knowledge) coexist - in the framework of the sociodox of emotivist self and bureaucrats: „The contrast between this democratization of moral agency and the elitist monopolies of managerial and therapeutic expertise could not be sharper”.⁷⁶ But they coexist in modernity.

„But in fact what is crucial is that on which the contending parties agree, namely that there are only two alternative modes of social life open to us, one in which the free and arbitrary choices of individuals are sovereign and one in which the bureaucracy is sovereign, precisely so that it may limit the free and arbitrary choices of individuals... the politics of modern societies oscillate between a freedom which is nothing but a lack of regulation of individual behavior and forms of collectivist control designed

⁷⁵ See Wilson 2008

⁷⁶ MacIntyre 1985, 32



*only to limit the anarchy of self-interest... bureaucracy and individualism are partners as well antagonists. And it is in the climate of this bureaucratic individualism that the emotivist self is naturally at home”.*⁷⁷

However, one may say that this view of sociodox is typical mainly among conservatives, and the modernists are modernist because they think it possible to create a different society which works by means of a different and new kind of amoral, liberating and effective control based on “objective social laws”. But the sociodox of the Chaotic Prison has not been the conservatives’ exclusive property. For example, Marx described capitalism as the struggle of egoistic individuals and at the same time as a system dominated by iron laws of necessities and “objective social laws”, which view is also a mixture of chaos and defencelessness to despotic control.

The same sociodox can be found in Weber’s writings, too. Nevertheless, Weber continued the romantic or Nietzschean critique of rationality when he connected the notion of too much control to rationality in the metaphor of the „iron cage”. Habermas, together with other members of the Frankfurt School, borrowed this line of argument from Weber in the analysis of the relation between rationality and domination in modernity. Habermas was particularly interesting in this tradition of critique of modernity, because he had an ambiguous view about modernity. And while he continued the critique of technical rationality, he tried to save optimistic hopes connected to rationality since the Enlightenment. His later effort resulted the concept of communicative rationality with utopical tone and consequences, developed in several volumes.

In his view, modernity as such is basically full of conflicts and lasting immorality, that is, *civitas terrena*, even if the root of these conflicts is not the

⁷⁷ MacIntyre 1985, 35

„The bifurcation of the contemporary social world into a realm of the organizational in which ends are taken to be given and are not available for rational scrutiny and a realm of the personal in which no rational social resolution of issues is available.” (MacIntyre 1985, 34)



immorality of men, but the instrumental and functional rationality. „We can speak of the ‘fundamental contradiction’ of a social formation when, and only when, its organizational principle necessitates that individuals and groups repeatedly confront one another with claims and intentions that are, in the long run, incompatible”.⁷⁸ This world of necessary conflicts is opposed to the world of communicative action (communicative rationality), which is a sort of millenarian community where neither power and authority, nor conflicts exist, and which is a terrain of mutual understanding and harmony. In the communicative community, the old problem of European tradition, that of the subordination of man to man would not exist any more.

Meaning is something opposed to chaos. The basic function of world-maintaining interpretations is to cope with chaos, that is, to master contingency and making some order in the world. Chaos is the lack of *nomos* (custom, law), that is, the loss of meaning. Meaning is closely connected to order. Habermas does not speak about „too much freedom”, but he talks a lot about the „loss of meaning”, that is, about the experience of interpersonal chaos. Chaos means the lack of a meaningful and ordered social world in which man is able to orient, that is, the actions of others are not clearly contingent but more or less foreseeable and the motivation of others’ actions is meaningful, that is, intersubjective. Meaningful social order involves the existence of common, intersubjective explanations for invisible-hand-like, unintended consequences, too. The loss of meaning, or Berger’s notion of the „homeless mind”, refers to the sense of everyday chaos or anomie. The loss of meaning, the homeless mind or the complaints about licentiousness refer to the unstable and inscrutable nature of everyday life and the concomitant conflicts. And if meaningful social order is lost, normativity is also lost. It does not seem too hard to connect the notion of the loss of meaning to the idea of Chaotic Prison. The modern loss of meaning seems to be the same experience as was described in the story of the Tower of Babel. In the

⁷⁸ Habermas 1980, 27



story of the Tower of Babel, disobedient people lost their common language, they lost any intersubjectivity and any chance for understanding and meaningful cooperation. They were dropped into a meaningless, contingent world in which any cooperation or any meaningful social relation became impossible. The people, incapable of orienting and mapping their social world, are disordered. In this story, chaotic world is not connected to the notion of too much liberty, but to the loss of meaning. Habermas' critique of modern lifeworld is not a complaint about licentiousness, but about the loss of meaning and incapacity for communicating. He explains this loss of meaning „*as effects of the uncoupling of system and lifeworld*”,⁷⁹ that is, something uniquely modern. (Emphasis is added) The loss of meaning as a special phenomenon of modernity is a result of the rationality of system-integration which is fused with the political system (the state). The loss of meaning is the result of colonization of lifeworld by highly effective system integration. So, the experience of intersubjective chaos is connected to the technical rationality, using “objective social-economical laws” to administer the things.

Habermas explains the sociodox of Chaotic Prison in a theoretical framework borrowed from Lockwood. The system-integration divorced from the social one (lifeworld), a process which was followed by the colonizing attempts of system-integration, that is, system-integration tries to shape social integration in accordance with its own functional needs, independently of the historically emerging elements of tradition-lifeworld. Because of the invasion of system-integration (instrumental and functional rationality), lifeworld becomes meaningless, fragmented and chaotic. Hume's or Burke's critique of rationalism was based on the argument that society, that is, tradition-lifeworld cannot be created rationally, and even the attempt to do so demolishes society and freedom. One can find the same argument targeted against instrumental and functional rationality of modernity in Habermas who developed his critique of the big and

⁷⁹ Habermas 1995, 318



arbitrary welfare state in terms of system-integration. He perceived the loss of freedom as a result of the "iron cage". The iron cage is „an administered, totally reified world in which means-end rationality and domination are merged”.⁸⁰ Following Weber, Habermas exploits the traditional argument of anti-rationalists, which describes rationality as a means of arbitrary power, and something that homogenises life-styles and results in the loss of meaning. Despite its reactionary or anti-Enlightenment origin, this argument is rather common among the members of the Frankfurt School. In this critique, rationality, as the means of a new kind of power, is responsible for modern anomie because it demolishes both intersubjective normative tradition-lifeworld and normativity in politics: „a colonization of lifeworld by system imperatives that drive moral-practical elements out of private and political public spheres of life”.⁸¹

This invasion of system-integration into tradition-lifeworld was brought about by the attempt to create obedience (engineering mass loyalty). This attempt was not successful, its unintended result, however, is that „the communicative practice of everyday life is one-sidedly rationalised into a utilitarian life-style”.⁸² The loss of meaning is a consequence of the fragmentation of tradition-lifeworld caused by this attempt of system-integration to create a new and functionally convenient lifeworld. „This communicative infrastructure is threatened by two interlocking, mutually reinforcing tendencies: *systemically induced reification* and *cultural impoverishment*”.⁸³ (Emphasis is added) So, the old modernist hope for administration of things by means of “objective social laws” unfortunately succeeded, and this success resulted the meaningless lifeworld of modern age. The system-integration (political system) is increasingly independent of lifeworld, that is, increasingly norm-free, which is nothing but arbitrariness from the point of view of individuals. And this norm-free system-integration invades lifeworld and

⁸⁰ Habermas 1995, 333

⁸¹ Habermas 1995, 325

⁸² Habermas 1995,

⁸³ Habermas 1995, 327



deprives it of its intersubjective, common normative structures. This colonization is the supercession of normativity by instrumental and functional rationality: „when interactions are no longer coordinated via norms and values, or via process of reaching understanding, but via the medium of exchange value... they transform social and intrapsychic relations into instrumental relations”.⁸⁴ This colonization of lifeworld results in „a loss of meaning and freedom”, that is, chaos coexists with the loss of freedom. What is necessary for freedom is an intersubjective, meaningful order and not a system.

But with the loss of meaning the possibility of normative consensus, that is, legitimation is also lost. Habermas, in a rather similar way to Burke, writes about the necessary failure of the attempts to engineer mass loyalty, obedience. The „political system... cannot produce mass loyalty in any desired amount”.⁸⁵

„A legitimation deficit means that it is not possible by administrative means to maintain or establish effective normative structures to the extent required. During the course of capitalist development, the political system shifts its boundaries not only into the economic system but also into the socio-cultural system. While organizational rationality spreads, cultural traditions are undermined and weakened. The residue of tradition must, however, escape the administrative grasp, for traditions important for legitimation cannot be regenerated administratively. Furthermore, administrative manipulation of cultural matters has the unintended side effect of causing meanings and norms previously fixed by tradition and belonging to the boundary conditions of the political system to be publicly thematized”.⁸⁶

This inherently conservative view about non-rationally-constituted character of intersubjective morality was used by Burke to explain the chaos of

⁸⁴ Habermas 1995, 336

⁸⁵ Habermas 1995, 347

⁸⁶ Habermas 1980, 47



the Revolution, just like Habermas used this argument to explain the loss of meaning and the demolition of social integration (lifeworld) in the welfare state.

*„The cultural system is peculiarly resistant to administrative control. There is no administrative production of meaning... The procurement of legitimation is self-defeating as soon as the mode of procurement is seen through. Cultural traditions have their own, vulnerable, conditions of reproduction. They remain „living” as long as they take shape in an unplanned, nature-like manner, or are shaped with hermeneutic consciousness... A cultural tradition loses precisely this force as soon as it is objectivistically prepared and strategically employed. In both cases conditions for the reproduction of cultural traditions are damaged, and the tradition is undermined”.*⁸⁷

Tradition, i.e. lifeworld sets limits to action, but tradition as such bounds administrative or any rational action, too, because it cannot be manipulated. The enlightened effort to liberate people from the bondage of tradition resulted a meaningless world, a chaos like the Tower of Babel, still people experienced the emergence of an irresistible new sort of control.

By means of its media (power and money) the norm-free political system is growing too big and invades lifeworld in order to shape it in accordance with its own needs. Without the support of tradition-lifeworld, the political system cannot gain legitimation. It is true that the norms of tradition-lifeworld do not limit the

⁸⁷ Habermas 1980, 70-1

„a logic of development of world-view on which the imperatives of system integration have no influence”. (Habermas 1980, 8)

„administrative planning produces unintended unsettling and publicizing effects. These effects weaken the justification potential of traditions” (Habermas 1980, 72) „We have seen now that the state cannot simply take over the cultural system, and that expansion of the areas of state planning actually makes problematic matters that were formerly culturally taken for granted. „meaning” is a scarce resource and is becoming ever scarcer.” (Habermas 1980, 73); „...steering media... fail to work in domains of cultural reproduction, social integration and socialization; they cannot replace the action-coordinating mechanism of mutual understanding in these functions. Unlike the material reproduction of the lifeworld, its symbolic reproduction cannot be transposed onto foundations of system integration without pathological side effects.” (Habermas 1995, 323)



will of individuals and political system any more. But the lack of obedience to this norm-free, arbitrary political system (which is rational from its own point of view, but arbitrary from the point of view of citizens) increases the extent of the rational invasion into lifeworld. Habermas' view is based on the traditional dual conception of power/authority in social thinking. On the one hand, Habermas refers to normative control which allows the possibility of disobedience, and therefore needs obedience, that is, legitimation; on the other hand, he also refers to control via media which shape conditions and allow no alternatives, and therefore does not need obedience, that is, legitimation. The latter form of control is norm-free: based on rational social and economical laws, it operates via „factual” conditions. Its media make the modern welfare state too strong (second kind of control), but at the same time, the chronic absence of mass loyalty, obedience highlights its serious deficiency in regard to the first kind of control. That is why the welfare state tries to engineer the first kind of control (that is, legitimation, obedience) via the second one (that is, rationally exploiting its media for condition-formation).

Putting aside Habermas's modernist optimism, which supposes that lifeworld can be recreated by communicative rationality, his diagnosis of modernity fits in the tradition of social thinking described above. The loss of meaning is a loss of normativity in everyday life: instead of normative control, the political system deploys a norm-free control which does not require obedience. „In this process, free communication can be replaced only by massive manipulation, that is, by strong, indirect control”.⁸⁸ Through its media, the political system attains an omnipotence (both power and money is based on utilitarian means-end calculation), but it suffers from a deficit in legitimation and obedience. Habermas's utopia is a lifeworld which gives place to communicative activity, meaningful and mutual, without coercion and assymetrical relations - a vision similar to the civitas Dei. But in this imagery, society is a civitas terrena

⁸⁸ Habermas 1980, 83



which, because of its utilitarian rationality, lacks normativity, where only an arbitrarily forced control can sustain a relative peace and cooperation. And this control (power) cannot be norm-bounded, since norms have evaporated from lifeworld, and they cannot be recreated by a rational use of money or power. The members of system-integration (political system), the technocrats, see themselves to be rational, but from an outside perspective they appear to be not reasonable but arbitrary, because their activity is determined by an instrumental and functional rationality which, by its origin, has nothing to do with any reason embedded in existing tradition-lifeworld. But there is no return to Paradise; in modernity, tradition-lifeworld and normativity have ceased to exist, so even if the political system would like to anchor its activity in norms of tradition-lifeworld, it would not be able to do so.

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The colonization of lifeworld is the implementation of the explicit predictability-needs of several organizations against the opaqueness of common life. Any predictability that existed in lifeworld was always limited, it was only probability, and even though there were boundaries, they were fading away. Individual freedoms, just like predictability, were limited in tradition-lifeworld. The project of the Enlightenment tried to enhance both together by means of creating new norms and new way of regulation by means of “objective social laws”. An important difference between modernists and their critics is that the former think of the elimination of tradition-lifeworld as emancipation, while the latter interpret this experience as anomie. The modernist hoped that the new way of regulation is emancipatory and effective means to reform social world at the same time. As Dewey put it: „The effective control of their powers is not through precepts but through the regulation of their condition”.⁸⁹ At the same time it was

⁸⁹ Dewey 1993, 75



clear that “the conditionality of action is at odds with the idea of freedom”.⁹⁰ If actions are conditionally compelled, influenced or even determined, the human action can be modified or controlled by means of the “objective” scientific knowledge. The modernist hoped to make a morally better world by means of amoral scientific knowledge, but with the experience of liberation many other became dissatisfied with this kind irresistible rational control.

The non-normative („objective” or despotic) limitations do not need legitimation, i.e. moral justification because they do not need obedience. The critics of this new sort of control often point out that it is not manifest, it uses the „objective social and economical laws and necessities”, but it is always ambiguous whether these “objective laws” or the political system using them are „responsible” for the situation. (From the point of view of the present paper it is not important whether these “objective laws” really exist or not; and whether social engineers are able to use them for their purposes or not.) One of the essential statements of this tradition of the critique of modernity is that power, norm-free control has become increasingly hidden and irresponsible.

In this paper I tried to illustrate a paradoxical image of society (a sociodox), spreading after the collapse of the notion of the laws of nature. This image is based on the critique of two basic presuppositions fundamental in sociology. The first one is that there are no normative laws of nature („natural” normativity); an idea which led to the notion that every moral claim is arbitrary. The other presupposition important for the self-image of sociology is about the existence of objective social laws, which can be discovered by sophisticated methods and can be used rationally for controlling people. The presupposition of social and economical laws is inherently connected to the new kind of control which tries to shape conditions. Since Adam Smith, one of the main activities of social science, and also the basis of its claim for being a legitimate science, has been the search for the meaning of unintended social phenomena. Since the

⁹⁰ Turner 1992, 22



Wealth of Nations, social and economic thinking had to reflect upon the problem of an „invisible hand”, that is, how people achieve something which was not the part of their original intents. Smith's explanation to account for unintended consequences lay with Providence, but the social sciences secularized the invisible hand and offered plenty of explanations for this phenomenon. When critics of modernity refer to rationality as an irresistible means of control, they mean the supposedly discovered rational explanations of the „invisible hand”. The use of “objective laws” helps controlling agencies to create situations in which people can act only in the desired way, or to reach some goals which were not intended by any subject.

The critics of modernity agreed with their opponents, the moderns or progressives, in their caesural demand. The Chaotic Prison has been a characteristic thread in the modernity-as-crisis interpretation of the last two centuries. Instead of a theory of modernity it is a metaphore. The common elements of the above mentioned examples of the sociodox of the Chaotic Prison are: (1) that liberated modern people means the elimination of tradition-lifeworld, its norms, limitations and meanings which results in a chaotic, meaningless world where individuals are mutually defenceless against the arbitrary will of others; (2) that society, interpreted as tradition-lifeworld, cannot be created rationally; (3) that the parallel phenomena of increasing power and decreasing authority, results in anomie, legitimation problems and the emergence of a new and irresistible form of control. The new is never taken for granted but something alien, thus arbitrary in terms of existing norms of historically established common tradition-lifeworld, so, new control is always felt to be more coercive than the customary one. The sense of „unnaturalness” of the new kind of control is brought about by the fact that it does not acknowledge the habitual, customary limits which could bound the controlling activity of the political system. But the new kind of control typically tries to redraw these limits, it always attempts to define its own conditions and borders, that is, it tends to be self-defining, which is to say it



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knows no limits. The closer the description of modernity is to Augustine's *civitas terrena* and the meaningless world of the Tower of Babel, where vain, self-loving individuals are in eternal conflict and struggle, the more the political and social control looks (and/or is) arbitrary and despotic.



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