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## AMONG WEAKNESSES, SENSIBILITIES AND VULNERABILITIES: THE WEST'S COGNITIVE SOURCES OF THE SELF

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### INTRODUCTION

The ongoing debate about the condition of the world and the way forward hinges often on the economic arguments regarding China's growing influence, deepening crisis of democracy, the rise of authoritarianism, falling US supremacy and withering of economic potential. It provokes legitimate questions about the roots of some success stories, the reasons behind flagging economic conditions and the sources of multiple weaknesses.

The Western idea of democracy, human rights and economic order (Washington Consensus) is under the siege<sup>1</sup>. John Williamson formulated 10 principles of orthodox economic policy in 1989 which forwarder the list of macroeconomic best practices to better the welfare in developing countries – which gained him fame and the entry in encyclopaedias. Unfortunately, the Washington Consensus and Bretton Woods system – the inventions of the West and the fundamentals of the old order/*ancien regime* are crumbling under the pressure. The legitimacy of WTO, SWIFT, dollar and international sanction system is being constantly eroded making the question about the fall of the Western standards even more vocal. The West – East dichotomy evokes old arguments about the intercultural divisions and clashes put forward in *A Study of History* by Arnold Toynbee, Huntington's *The clash of*

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<sup>1</sup> A. Applebaum, *Autocracy, Inc.: The Dictators Who Want to Run the World*, Doubleday 2024.

*Civilization*, Bernald Lewis and above all Edward Said's *Orientalism* which framed the study of non-West using the post-structuralist method of narrative – becoming thus the foundational text in the post-colonial studies. The prevailing conviction was that different philosophies and traditions in the West and East produced different patterns of reasoning and mentality. The Western philosophers emphasized freedom, independence, critical thinking and individualism while the Eastern traditions of Confucianism, Taoism and Islam tended to focus on the concept of community, obedience and unity.<sup>2</sup> Is the framing of the old Easts-West debate still relevant or an anachronic simplification? Are the divisions between democratic and authoritarian regimes anchored different cultural, religious and philosophical patterns or are they merely emanations of individual character traits of the rulers and their political systems. Are the opening opening chasem anchored deep in mental processes or are they anchored in shallow waters?

The article's purpose is to identify and describe briefly the pronounced features of the Western thinking stemming from the philosophical, religious and political traditions which run a different course in comparison with the Eastern patterns (Middle Eastern and Asian). The thesis proposed is that the differences are irreconcilable but manageable. The main orientation points are arguments outlining the growth of Western-style notions of rationality, secularism, law and language as a tools forming the current Western ecosystem characterized by endurance and vulnerabilities. The ontological and epistemological perspective with their methods of inquiry offer concrete opportunities for the study of *being* and *knowing* whereby allowing for the better study of the reality. The article's thesis is that the current escalation of tensions in the world accompanied by the uptick of enthusiasm for authoritarian forms of governance are a transitional phenomenon stemming from the intellectual crisis in the West, institutional inadequacies, the enrichment of new social classes and the replacement of old elites with new ones. However, the West will endure the turmoil due to its traditions of critical thinking. The Western rationality, secularism, institutional arrangements, legal thinking and the concept of language (social constructivism) will prevail and triumph due to its *soft power* attractiveness. The text is outlining the weaknesses of the West symbolized by Hamlet's syndrome as well as abstract modern paradigms of analysis proposed by various philosophical schools which undermined the existing orders not offering much in return. The culmination of the Western paradoxes, and another example, was the concept

<sup>2</sup> L. Qingxue, *Understanding Different Cultural Patterns or Orientations Between East and West*, *Investigationes Linguisticae* 2000, vol. IX; D. Robson, „How East and West think in profoundly different ways”, 10 January 2017, <https://www.bbc.com/future/article/20170118-how-east-and-west-think-in-profoundly-different-ways> [accessed: 16.03.2024].

of „post-pornography”<sup>3</sup> as the end-product of queer/feminist moment in the United States – sparked by the tradition of Frankfurt School of Philosophy. It illustrates well the problem of irreconcilability of the West with Eastern traditions and the unavoidable clash of civilizations. The concept of post-pornography which is very much in vogue today as the sexual tool against the oppressive, patriarchal governments will never gain an upper hand in Eastern cultural circles and will not enjoy the popular approbation in the near future due to objective conditions – conservative mentality and religious upbringing in many parts of the world (outside of the West). What started in the West as the conversation about the interweaving of sex and society in Marcus's *Eros and Civilization*, Foucault's *The History of Sexuality* and Freud's *An Outline of Psycho-analysis*<sup>4</sup> ended with the current political movement aspiring to replace, *toutes proportions gardées*, the old social contract theories (18th century product) with the modern sexual contract theory (consisting of the distinctive mix of conceptual approaches coming to a prominence (politics, universities) in the second half of the 20th century such as LGBT, gender studies, queer studies and post-pornography theory).

One could say that only Western sophistication and unfettered philosophical tradition could beget such social and political concept (post-pornography) as the element of mainstream discourse. On the other hand, it is a fitting and expected (unavoidable) element in the landscape which Hannah Arendt called a *plurality*.

The article discerns five milestones in the Western tradition of thought which are understood as important factors to explain the uniqueness of the West. These events are suggested to play a major role in building weakness, sensibilities and resilience of the West. The first event was Plato's idea of God as a demiurge (δημιουργός) and logos (λόγος) in his dialogues *Theaetetus* (main epistemological work studying the definition of knowledge), *Politeia* (political study on the best arrangement/regime in the state called Kallipolis) and *Laws* (legal work on the significance of legislators' activities). In these books Plato supported the *imitation* of God and *conversion* to religion with the memorable quote from *Laws*: *In our eyes God will be „the measure of all things” in the highest degree – a degree much higher than is any „man” they talk of*<sup>5</sup>. The significance of Plato's passage on God was its logic based character, avoidance of mythology and the act of rejecting revelation

<sup>3</sup> T. Gregory, A. Lorang, *Teaching Post-Pornography*, Cultural Studies Review 2018, vol. 24(1), p. 137; A. Araszkievicz, „Seks przeciwko władzy: postpornografia (naprawdę) objaśnia nam świat”, <https://krytykapolityczna.pl/kultura/seks-przeciwko-wladzy-postpornografia-naprawde-objasnia-nam-swiat/> [accessed: 16.03.2024].

<sup>4</sup> S. Freud, *The Mind and its Workings* [in:] J. Strachey (ed.), *An Outline of Psycho-analysis*, London, UK: W. W. Norton & Company, 1989.

<sup>5</sup> See: Plato, *Laws*, Book 4, section 716c, <https://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0166%3Abook%3D4%3Apage%3D716> [accessed: 16.03.2024].

as the foundation of metaphysics – what produced naturally the idea of deism. He used the reason and observation not faith and intuition to believe in God what inspired future generations – among them was Spinoza nad his image of God as well as many architects of the Enlightenment considered themselves as deists including main signatories of American constitution). The second event was the role of Sophists in the development of Western intellectual tradition. Above all, they were credited with their secular concept of natural law and the nature common to all people – which connected all people as equal creatures. This desacralized human rights and introduced the notion of cosmopolitanism. The third event concerns the influence of Duns Scot and William Ockham on the philosophical and theological narrative of the West. Ockham suggested something which, under the veil of innocence, laid the ground for the future Luther movement and the beginning of people's mental emancipation from the religion. Despite being a Franciscan monk espousing *fideism* (not reason but only faith gives access to the truth) he proposed the thesis which revolutionalized the theological and political dimensions in consequence (and it was not Ockham's razor). He argued that only *voluntas ordinata* could be discerned by human reason suggesting indirectly the impossibility of learning more about God's plans. By reserving for God the total freedom of decision making he constructed the bizzare argument about God being unpredictable or even whimsical. This line of reasoning had outraged Pope Benedict XVI to such an extent he compared dead Ockham to the medieval Islamic thinker Ibn Hazna in his famous Regensburg Address on September 12th 2006 – what sparked the unintended theological controversy and a wave of protests across the Middle East. Ockham's innovative idea about God prepared grounds for positivist school of law which looked for sources of law not in natural law/nature but in mundane world of legislators sitting in the parliamentary benches and writing statutes. The fourth event is Immanuel Kant's work liberating humanity for the first time in history. By disconnecting the proces of acquiring knowledge by studying the nature and people's goals he launched the pursuit for completely different quality of cognition. The source of it was to be the reason and only reason. He set himself to solving the dilemma of getting objective knowledge and found it in the concept of *noumen* and *analytic judgements a priori*. His idea of transcending the experience and digging to the depths of the reason was refreshing and epistemologically revolutionary. He got rid of all old sources of knowledge acquired via human nature and revelation and reached directly to human reason – laying silently stepping stones for deontological systems of ethics and secular worldview. The fifth seminal event's significance belongs to the group of thinkers who jointly changed the thinking of the West about the foundations of law and *procedural democracy*<sup>6</sup>. Their

<sup>6</sup> N. Urbinati, M.P. Saffon, *Procedural Democracy, the Bulwark of Equal Liberty*, <https://philpapers.org/rec/URBPDT> [accessed: 16.03.2024].

The essay outlines: a „political proceduralist vision of democracy as the normative defense of democracy in contemporary politics...” epistemic conception of democracy as a process of truth seeking.

arguments created final conditions for secularization or desacrilization of the human law and people's rights without destroying the reference to morality. Since the beginning of Judeo-Christian tradition people struggled to reconcile legal points of references (norms, principles and standards) with the theological perspective. They tried to embed the moral/legal prescriptions with the commands of higher law originating metaphysically. The idea of religion and God served this purpose (Judaism – Moses, Christianity – Jesus, the cult of saints, Islam – Mohammed). The solution for the removal of abstract point of references (whether religion or the law of nature) came in the shape of procedural theory of natural law. It took a form of a set of procedures to be followed voluntarily. However, this legal convention took distance from the theory of positivism which had its origins in discretionary human action without recourse to morality (separation of law and morality). The solution how to bypass religion but at the same time to preserve the constructive legacy of religion was reflected for example in the famous legal debate between Ronald Dworkin and H.L.A. Hart. Hart represented the positivist theory of law while Dworkin criticized him formulating the interpretative theory of law (theory of law as integrity) put forward in his famous studies *The Model of Rules I* and *Law's Empire*. Dworkin created a fictional persona of judge called Hercules who would always arrive at right legal answer (right answer theory) by interpretative method of finding the right answer following moral judgments which would fit the institutional legal arrangements (law as integrity). Not anymore God and religion nor abstract nature (like in the case of Sophists) would produce yardsticks of proper standards but the correct reasoning.<sup>7</sup> The debate complemented other debates focused on rationality in law. They were conducted in the context of the procedural theories of natural law (Fuller – Hart debate). Lon Luvois Fuller was also a critic of legal positivism and outmost defender of morality in law. But it was also secular morality encapsulated by eight procedural principles to be followed strictly. A believer in morality Fuller stressed often that law did not originate in heaven nor stemmed from nature but was sourced from the social realities and man itself (social constructivism). Besides Hart's rule of recognition theory, Dworkin's judge Hercules metaphor, Fuller's procedural theory of natural law it is also worth mentioning the theory of John Rawls (veil of ignorance) and Habermas's ideal speech situation. They all had a common denominator – they generated the space for human activity free from theological and metaphysical shackles – the space characterized by rationality.

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<sup>7</sup> S. J. Shapiro, „On Hart's Way Out,” [in:] Hart's Postscript: Essays on the Postscript to the Concept of Law, (ed.) J. Coleman, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001. Also: S. Shapiro, „The „Hart-Dworkin” Debate: A Short Guide for the Perplexed”, Michigan Law, Working Paper No. 77 March 2007, [https://law.yale.edu/sites/default/files/documents/pdf/Faculty/Shapiro\\_Hart\\_Dworkin\\_Debate.pdf](https://law.yale.edu/sites/default/files/documents/pdf/Faculty/Shapiro_Hart_Dworkin_Debate.pdf) [accessed: 16.03.2024].

## SELECTED EXAMPLES OF MODERN PARADIGMS OF INTERPRETATION – ARS GRATIA ARTIS

The Western interpreters of the reality often connect the current diagnosis to the historical interpretations of the past by treating it as a guiding light in order to build prognosis and anticipate the future. It was the case of problems with the anticipation of Russian invasion of Ukraine on February 22nd, 2023. The poverty of historical analogies and its applicability to current situation was studied by Karl Popper in his seminar work „The Poverty of Historicism” which encapsulated the problem of inadequacies of historicism as a working methodology<sup>8</sup>. Popper focused on the problems of applying the past to the present by forwarding arguments about the uniqueness of each historical event and unpredictability of human behaviour. He also beautifully argued against inexorable laws of historical destiny. The critics of Popper’s approach referenced to the inherent errors in Popper’s methodology by focusing too much on the totality of structure which inhibited the detail of concrete facts and persons.<sup>9</sup>

The western thinkers found also intellectual refuge in many modern, relatively new alternative methods of deconstructing reality. Some of them formed the critical theory school of thought developed in the 20th century. Represented by the Frankfurt School group of thinkers such as Erich Fromm, Theodore Adorno, Max Horkheimer or Herbert Marcuse the school proposed a toolbox of interpretative concepts to read reality. The legacy of Frankfurt School included many interesting ideas which helped to describe the changing world again and again. Unfortunately, it mainly focused on challenging the existing frameworks of cognition, revealing oppressive power structures and criticizing the governments. It played more a descriptive than reformative function criticizing the modes of thinking. This movement created such approaches like feminism, post-structuralism, phenomenology, critical race theory, queer theory, postcolonialism marxist theory. They advised how to dismantle the power structures of oppression. However, the prevailing tendency of these Western schools of thought was predominantly to criticize the reality not offering much beyond it.

The example of it can be found in the corresponding discourses on power and repression of sex between Foucault and Marcuse. Two philosophers advanced exciting arguments about sex as repressive tool of the power structures and how they shaped the societies over centuries but in fact their complex debates served no constructive purpose of changing the world. Michel Foucault in the first volume of *The History of Sexuality* by Foucault painted a broad characterization of the „repressive hypothesis” presented by Marcuse but it did not offer much except intellectual exercise in

<sup>8</sup> K. Popper, *Poverty of Historicism*, Routledge, 2nd edition, 2002.

<sup>9</sup> K. Kosík (1976). *Dialectics of the Concrete*.

questioning for the sake of it: „I would also distinguish myself from para-Marxists like Marcuse who give the notion of repression an exaggerated role—because power would be a fragile thing if its only function were to repress, if it worked only through the mode of censorship, exclusion, blockage and repression in the manner of a great Superego exercising itself only in a negative way”.

Jeffrey Renaud in his text „Rethinking the Repressive Hypothesis” summarized Foucault’s arguments about combination of sex and power in his discussion of Marcuse’s work:” If power is understood as that force that merely represses sex, and if this repression is connected to the development of capitalism, then the overthrow of capitalism and the liberation of the repressed will be accomplished simultaneously”<sup>10</sup>.

Foucault’s great contribution were his ideas on power-knowledge, archeology of knowledge, genealogy of power and, above all, his idea of biopolitics. It provided the insight into the government’s regulation of population’s bodies, behaviours and lives what was reflected in the concept – politics is applied biology. In addition to aforementioned social characterizing Foucault was also right in formulating his argument about governments using sex practices and regulations in much more sophisticated ways than only through repression (repressive hypothesis).

Probably the notable exception among the intellectuals – from practical utility point of view – was the work of Jürgen Habermas, a former member of NSDAP. He not only questioned the reality but looked for solutions. He analyzed the concept communicative rationality and deliberative democracy offering the solution in place of arid critique only<sup>11</sup>. But he drew criticism from intellectual circles (considering themselves as progressive) for accepting NATO intervention in Kosovo and Israel’s military responses to Hamas attacks. The European intellectuals faithful to the Western tradition of mortification and rejection of force attacked Habermas from the position of political correctness and inherited anti-Americanism.

The weakness of the West beyond the doctrinal and methodological dimensions is also underlined by other factors which account for inherent oversensitivity embedded in modern political, ethical and economic spheres. The prominent place among them features the Western concept of law and order, the doctrine of human rights, political correctness, culture of legalism so flamboyant in Anglo-Saxon countries and its best economic practices in clash now with authoritarian governments such as e.g. China and Russia (Trump’s claim of unfair trade practices).

These high-ground principles constitute the bedrock of our democratic governance system but at the same time they undermine the West’s position by paralyzing

<sup>10</sup> J. Renaud, Symposium 2013, vol. 17, no. 2.

<sup>11</sup> H. Jürgen, B-H. Seyla, *Modernity versus Postmodernity*, New German Critique 1981, vol. 22, pp. 3–14.

the willpower through its dispersed notions of „plurality and freedom.” As Hannah Arendt put it: „Human plurality, the basic condition of both action and speech has the twofold character of equality and distinction... And as living amidst plurality we can threaten each other.” Robert Berkowitz summed up the persistent threats the plurality is posing for the West when pondering on Arendt’s concept: „Thus politics, the activity that is founded upon plurality is dangerous and threatening as it requires that we engage with and seek to think with and understand those who are meaningfully different from ourselves as nevertheless human and part of our common world. This is the source of the ancient prejudice against politics that begins with Plato and accelerates in the modern world; we are terrified that actual reconciling ourselves with the plurality of our world will lead to danger...”<sup>12</sup> The author repeats in this sentence the common misconception about Plato’s vision of his Ideal State. As discussed by the protagonists Glaucon and Adeimantus the state in its external (institutional) arrangements looked communist but it was designed like this for pragmatic reasons. At that time of Plato and low level of education, lack of mass media and decadent attitudes of the population only a strict segmentation of the masses into three classes of people and the ruler king was a sufficient bulwark against an anarchy. In terms of internal (individual) arrangements the members of the society were to remain spiritually free in pursuit of the notion of good.<sup>13</sup> As obvious on closer inspection Plato’s state did not pose claim to absorb the totality of man’s being, its internal freedom, its free time and thus was not totalitarian in the sense of, for example, current totalitarian state’s of North Korea, China or Russia where the level of surveillance allows to permeate every aspect of human beings’ lives. Hans Gadamer devoted to the analysis of it the whole book on Plato. In addition Plato’s Politeia elaborated on the concept of equality of women by demanding the inclusion of women into the class of soldiers. The right of women to serve in the US and other Western countries is quite a recent phenomenon which places Plato in the group of first advocates of *feminism* as a political doctrine – what found its realization only in 20th century as part of Frankfurt School legacy and postmodern vision of the world.

Plato’s republic (Ideal State) in terms of its pragmatism and rationality bears exactly the same intellectual traits as the republican project of the Founding Fathers in the United States in 1774. It segmentated society into groups of property holders

<sup>12</sup> R. Berkowitz, „Plurality and Freedom”, <https://hac.bard.edu/amor-mundi/plurality-and-freedom-2020-12-03> [accessed: 16.03.2024]; João J. Vila-Chá, „The Plurality of Action: Hannah Arendt and the Human Condition” <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40337103> [accessed: 16.03.2024].

<sup>13</sup> E. Anowa, „Plato’s Concept of Democracy and Contemporary Political Scenario in Nigeria”, *International Journal of Academic Multidisciplinary Research (IJAMR)*, <https://philarchive.org/archive/EUGPCO> [accessed: 16.03.2024].

exercising full rights, „white trash” (propertyless white men), women (reproducers and cooks without political rights) and Negroes (slaves as objects).

Adriana Cavarero brings up another streak in the contemporary studies on plurality and accompanying challenges: „in light of the current populist turn of Western liberal democracies our interest in Arendt's work should rather focus on the *Human Condition*. This is especially true for the phenomenon dubbed as ‘digital populism’, a recent form of politics characterized by the use of social media for fueling and spreading the typical”.<sup>14</sup>

In addition, the democratic order imposes rotation in offices, accountability, representative governments what leads to excessive overintellectual philosophing, the imperative of orderly thinking and proclivity for moral reflection. The characteristic features take especially ridiculous turn and amount to self-destructive influences in the European Left – characteristics predominantly nonexistent in the authoritarian value systems run single-handedly (Putin in Russia) or by a narrow group of interests (China – CCP) terrorising and exterminating opposition.

None of this exists in Eastern authoritarian political culture where social and economic lifes are subjugated to corrupted cliques of interests following their own intersubjective set of rules derived from completely different historical experience and cultural traditions. The optimistic beliefs in coexistence, acculturation, cohabitations and the end of history turned out to be vain projections by Western intellectuals. The Eastern cultural patterns do not include the idea of *compromise* into their intellectual code system. The uncompromising, realistic portrait of the Eastern system of values was presented well in commentary by profesor Karolina Lanckoronska in her memoirs *Those Who Trespass Against Us: One Woman's War Against the Nazis* where she shared her dramatic accounts of the Soviet soldiers' occupation of her beloved Lvov in 1939<sup>15</sup>. She left no illusions about the nature of deep divisions between the West and the East – the brutal and primitive Russian officers washing hair in the toilet basin being the least of her worries. The potential for the progress of civilization through the Eastern barbarians was a mere illusion for her. Being obstinate in her evaluations she has never returned to her Lvov. It is interesting that her eye witness account, written in 1945, was rejected by European publishers for decades. To politically correct delusive Western intellectuals her true story was either as too anti-Russian or as too anti-German – as a prisoner in the concentration camp she described also the German proclivity for barbarism. The recollections of the famous Polish activist, scientist,

<sup>14</sup> A. Cavarero, *Human Condition of Plurality*, Arendt Studies 2018, Vol. 2, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/48511479> [accessed: 16.03.2024].

<sup>15</sup> K. Lanckoronska, *Those Who Trespass Against Us: One Woman's War Against the Nazis*, Pimlico, 2006.

and Lviv woman Karolina Lanckorońska took a new symbolic significance in light of the military experience of Ukrainians defending the West against Eastern barbarians.

In a similar tone, used to assess the Russian mentality distinguished classical philologist professor Zofia Abramowiczówna when recollecting the Soviet occupation of Vilnius. She was chased by the Soviets from her town and never wanted to see again the „barbarians”.

## OVERINTELLECTUAL MORALISM AS THE PROMINENT SOURCE OF WEAKNESS

The ideals such as just order or *eunomia*, civil law, the rule of reason, the idea of human rights, Judeo-Christian tradition, H. Arendt's concept of policy are (in this order or chronologically) to „blame” for deteriorating power of the West. These noble things at this moment are the reason of lasting crippling effect on the international stature of the West as a set of standards to be followed. They became a source of guilty conscience and created an effect similar to Hamletian procrastination. Samuel Taylor Coleridge an English poet (belonging to a group of Lake Poets and the founder of Romantic Movement) is quoted as saying that Hamlet's problem was simply – thinking too much<sup>16</sup>.

The Western tradition preoccupied with concern for morality, rule of law and psychological introspection dragged the West to fall in Hamlet's pitfalls. The condition of mental paralysis by contemplating too much instead of acting in the face of growing authoritarian evil is self-evident. Europe can not bring itself to act decisively today (as evidenced, for example, by the failure to deploy the European army planned since at least Saint Malo conference in 1998<sup>17</sup>) and examines constantly its own conscience

<sup>16</sup> Saif Al Deen Al-Ghammaz, *William J. Shakespeare's Hamlet: An Analysis of Revenge Quest & Procrastination*, February 2023, World Journal of English Language 13(2), pp. 317-323, [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/368567285\\_William\\_J\\_Shakespeare%27s\\_Hamlet\\_An\\_Analysis\\_of\\_Revenge\\_Quest\\_Procrastination](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/368567285_William_J_Shakespeare%27s_Hamlet_An_Analysis_of_Revenge_Quest_Procrastination) [accessed: 16.03.2024].

<sup>17</sup> „The never-ending debate of the European Army and why it is unhelpful”, <https://www.boell.de/en/2024/01/22/never-ending-debate-european-army-and-why-it-unhelpful> [accessed: 16.03.2024].

EU Battle Groups, EU Rappid Deployment Capacity, PESCO, EDF, ASAP and EDIRPA are still more conceptual proposals than real military idea. It suffices to remind that EU has 17 different types of battle tanks while the United States has only one; Europe has 20 types of combat aircraft – the USA has only six.

Joint Declaration on European Defence. Joint Declaration issued at the British-French Summit (Saint-Malo, 4 December 1998), [https://www.cvce.eu/content/publication/2008/3/31/f3cd16fb-fc37-4d52-936f-c8e9bc80f24f/publishable\\_en.pdf](https://www.cvce.eu/content/publication/2008/3/31/f3cd16fb-fc37-4d52-936f-c8e9bc80f24f/publishable_en.pdf) [accessed: 16.03.2024].

while others take advantage of it. Hamlet's dilemma encapsulates well this tragicomic situation of internal struggle to take decision. Hamlet's state of indecision were caused by his scruples which were twofold: moral – If I kill my uncle Claudius, I will be committing the sin of murder; if I commit suicide, I will be committing a mortal sin; and legal scruples – do I have credible proof beyond a reasonable doubt that my uncle really killed my father? Is the evidence provided to me by the spirit credible? Does it meet the criteria for due process?

Before Hamlet eventually proceeds to act he delivers seven soliloquies which open the window to his mental state and sensitive soul. In the most famous soul-searching in act 3, scene 1 he contemplates committing suicide in Freudian-style burst of prolonged introspection.

The Hamlet's hysterical procrastination is replicated today in the West's contemporary indecisiveness and the democratic culture of debating and questioning. The contemporary reluctance to resort to force was seen as a curse in case of Srebrenica which had cost the lives of Muslim civilians slaughtered by Mladic. The Dutch peacekeepers who were supposed to protect them were „fighting with hands tight behind as put it the Dutch commander Karra later on<sup>18</sup>.

It is worth reminding that reluctance to act and Hamlet's hesitation led to the self-annihilation of his family in the final scene during a fencing match.

The power structure based on rotation in offices of political functionaries and democratic accountability makes matters only worse for the Western societies in terms of the vulnerability to attacks. On the other hand the concept of order is also a paramount feature in Chinese tradition but it is based on completely different grounds. Order means hierarchical power structure subjugated to the efficiency and obedience of the political process and political rulers. As duly noticed the current marxist-leninist doctrinemo of Chinese politics controled by CCP is dealing with economic outcomes and leninist control of the society.

## *PHUSIS VERSUS NOMOS – THE RELIGIOUS PERSPECTIVE*

The Western cultural patterns from the beginning were shaped by the approach to religion which bore two characteristics: early separation of religion and state and the liberation of science from the shackles of metaphysics. It was marked by three thinking patterns what shaped Western uniqueness. The legacy was formed by the Sophists, William Ockham and Emanuell Kant. The Sophists believed in cosmopolitan natural

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<sup>18</sup> R.S. Taylor, „Karremans Recalls Srebrenica Fall, Institute for War and Peace Reporting”, <https://iwpr.net/global-voices/karremans-recalls-srebrenica-fall> [accessed: 16.03.2024].

law as a function of the human nature and, in addition, they were sceptical about the religion disconnecting their school of thinking from the natural mythological inclinations at that time. William Ockham – although he wrote in the Dark Ages and was informed by the religious zeal- his studies led him to *extreme voluntarism* which commanded the respect for the commands of the ruler. He discarded the teleological Aristotelian-tomistic tradition of natural law as a product of divine revelation recognized by the reason for the submission to the ruler. In this way he prepared the ground for legal and ethical positivism. As to Emmanuel Kant he reversed the order of things. What became to be known as the „Copernican revolution” in thinking he made man the main source of moral knowledge through practical reason and the source of other information through theoretical knowledge. His conclusion was revolutionary – the true source of all knowledge, natural law and religion was not in human nature, not in the nature of society or world (like in case of Rousseau) but in the constructed *a priori* categories/forms of pure reason. Even the category/concept of God was the product of reason. This was the shaping, crucial moment for Western civilization which liberated human beings and unleashed powerful forces of absolute freedom.

The Sophists revolution planted the seeds of the secular breakthrough in thinking which finally culminated in contemporary liberalism and modern politics. Attribution of things to the intellectual appraisal and the evolution of reason/common sense contributed to all modern concepts in philosophy and politics. They postulated the concept of natural law as reflecting things common to human nature across the geographical spectrum. The law of nature was a human invention having nothing to do with the divine law which was concocted by some people to instill a fear of God in other people to maintain leverage on them. The law of nature offered things common and good for all people such as protecting life and pursuit of sensual pleasure (sensualism). The man-made law should reflect all these natural desires in the form of conventional form (conventionalism). If it did not it meant that it was not referring properly to natural law but was created to someone's interest. According to one group of Sophists such one could be disrespected if nobody was watching. Following the distorted law meant that someone was abiding by the law practically (was just) but in fact was committing an evil act.

The Sophists the forerunners in critical thinking created a model of rationalism and were the first proponents of natural law, social contracts and religious scepticism. *Homo mensura* idea and epistemological and ontological contributions were also part of their legacy.

Although there was one group of Sophists postulated that the law of nature should reflect the will of the stronger party the other group stood firmly on the ethical/moral grounds that the law nature should encapsulate good things for the humanity. In addition, they deducted from the commonality of human nature the evidence about the equality of all people (*cosmopolitanism*).

## THE REPUBLICAN AND DEMOCRATIC TRADITION OF THE WEST – THE PHILOSOPHICAL PERSPECTIVE

The concept of „just order” was introduced into the Western political thought by Solon who designed the contours of modern politics based on the idea of public good and mixed government – long before Polibius, Cicero and Montesquieu perfected this intellectual invention. The concept of *order* is also a paramount feature in Chinese tradition but it is based on completely different grounds. Order reminiscences *fair and rational organization* in the Western political thought while in the Eastern civilization it means hierarchical power structure subjugated to the efficiency and obedience of the political process and political rulers. As duly noticed the current Marxist-Leninist doctrine of Chinese politics controlled by CCP is dealing with economic outcomes and control of the society.

The civil law and the rule of law not of men (as the principle was propagated in 18th century America), republicanism, direct/indirect democracy, the idea of representative government, H. Arendt's concept of *polity* are other Western inventions dating back to the times of Athenian democracy – with the power of *ecclesia* or popular gatherings. It survived through the Roman Republic times symbolized by the institutions such as *comitia*, *senatus*, *preator* and even withered the onslaught of tugs who killed Cicero near Arpinum and authoritarian hardening grip on power by Octavianus Augustus who designated himself first as *Princeps Civitatis* and then Roman Emperor (he introduced the principate system of government after the battle of Accium in 31 BC which lasted until the Third Century in 284 AD). Even though he liquidated *comitia* or popular assemblies he still preserved the Roman *senat* purging it from corruption and treating as a consultative body. The Roman Empire despite the initiation of the imperial cult by Octavian also cultivated the idea of law as the point of reference diving leaving to subsequent generations the dual heritage of *ius civile* and *ius gentium*.

The concept in Cicero writings corresponded with the idea of justice embodied in natural law (as a sublime reflection of god given norm) uncorrupted by the whims of people and discovered in human mind by the *preators* and jurists. The natural law conception as a sort of subliminal message passed by the Providence and ingrained in human mind marks the apex of ancient human intellectual sophistication and a great longing for human dignity (*dignitas*) stemming from the fact of man being created in godly image. The natural law was accepted by people as natural since the intellect was identifying/pinpointing repetitive actions of people occurring naturally to all people at anytime.

It was a crucial point in political development inherited from Judean tradition since the obedience to the norms received a higher sanction. This concept carried on

in the writings of Seneca and Thomas of Aquinas. When future revolutionaries were deposed by old rulers and unjust order they found the justification in the natural law only without the balast of religion as something objective and lasting and orderly.

In the Anglo-Saxon tradition the rule of objective and universal law found its expression in Magna Carta and writings of Bracton who was the first jurist to compile cases in one book consolidating a trend towards a common law tradition. Others followed into his footsteps.

The biggest „culprit” is the arrival of such concepts as: the pure and critical rule of reason. It was an emancipating moment in the West when the philosophy was devoid of theology opening wide territories for freedom of thinking and acting. One of the first prominent writers was William of Ockham who in dark ages of medieval times pointed to the power of human reasoning apart from God. More than that, he introduced the idea of *voluntarism* suggesting even that God could be whimsical and cruel if he only wanted incurring thus the criticism of Benedict XVI centuries later in the famous Ratisbon lectures – which ignited in turn Islamic protests across the world.

Ockham's studies crawled into the underpinings of *rationalism* of Descartes. The separation of theology and philosophy/metaphysics was reflected in his „natural philosophy” and was pursued in his famous books. He embarked on discovering science and natural laws which led him – like in cases of Cicero and Ockham- to disclose the underlying laws of nature in mental processes of *human reason*. Like Cicero discovered the natural law norms in the human intellect so Descartes intuited the truth by using the mind: „*By „intuition” I do not mean the fluctuating testimony of the senses or the deceptive judgment of the imagination as it botches things together, but the conception of a clear and attentive mind, which is so easy and distinct that there can be no room for doubt about what we are understanding.*”

It was through human intellect that human beings can acquire ultimate truth about the nature of reality – through purely intellectual perception (In this sense he was negating Aristotle's observation – „There is nothing in the intellect that was not previously in the senses”).

Descartes formulated radical thesis which will be later expanded by Kant and will contribute both the greatness of the West's rationalism but at the same time will doom the West to moralizing and extreme rationalism. Descartes pointed to the reason which corrects sense-perception in cases of disagreement or conflict between the two faculties. Whereas the proper use of reason does not require submitting the beliefs it generates.

The originality of Kantian thought did not rely only in his apotheosis of reason as the human faculty enabling new epistemological perspective of the truth. What is more important, Kant also broke with the tradition of linking human norms, values and morality with the tradition of studies over human nature. He created the „*noumenal*

reality” where the norm and standards were not implied from the human nature/nature like philosophers previously maintained. On the contrary, he pursued different path – the natural law was not only not deducted from the human nature but was formulated even against the human nature. The true place where natural law was mined was the intellect or „practical reason”. Only there the good will and moral freedom and autonomy could be found – *the only good thing you can think of is good will* ... in mind.<sup>19</sup>

He just exchanged the human nature for the *practical reason* as the breeding place of norms. In this way he justified his *kategorischer imperativer/categorical imperative* and developed his deontological moral system of „what should be done” on the objectivity of reasoning instead of subjectivity of natural law theories from the past.

He seemed to resolve one of the fundamental dilemmas dating back to the Age of the Enlightenment which often questioned human nature as the source of natural law allegedly reflecting godly prescriptions. The polemic against the natural law – originating from the human nature and discovered by the intellect- was famously opened by David Hume who in his book „Treaty on the Human Nature” formulated arguments against the traditional perspective on human nature. He there warned against deducting *ought* from *is* arguing that repetition itself of certain things by humans and the liking for them can not be a basis of considering something as good and universal or, in other words, as natural.

His objections led to creation of the so-called *naturalistic fallacy theory*. The controversy carried on and found supporters of this approach in the likes of John Locke who presented his theory of *tabula rasa* which was indicating the mistrust about human nature. As a *clean slate* the human intellect could not be a place of moral knowledge discovery since there was nothing imprinted inside upon the birth of human being – the knowledge was later accumulated through experience by humans in lifetime and his appraisal of human nature was very pessimistic. He questioned the concept of universal morality and the *Golden Rule* (mutuality principle) which was the most important commandment for the Christians. The naturalistic fallacy theory found its modern exposition in Paul Ehrlich book „Human Natures” (Paul Ehrlich book „Human Natures: Genes, Cultures and Human Prospect”, Washington, 2000).

The motives behind Lock's critique of innate ideas were particularly interesting and even revolutionary. He opposed inherent ideas inscribed in human mind as an inhibitor obscuring the rational judgment of human beings.

It was Kant who seemed to provide the lasting solution to the recurring dilemma regarding the subject of what forms the true knowledge about universal morals and values by delinking it from the religious stained notion of natural law and human

<sup>19</sup> I. Kant, *The Metaphysics of Morals*, translated by Mary J. Gregor, Cambridge University Press, 1991.

nature. He shared the doubts raised by the representatives of the approach that from the fact that something is regarded as the universal practice which is happening often the knowledge about morality can not be deduced.

It is important to reach behind the experience to identify acts as being moral or immoral – Kant claimed. Bentham shared his position that *ought* should never be implied from *is* if we do not want to fall into the fallacy trap and perpetuate wishful thinking distorting our cognition.

The liberty to think independently ignited a new wave in legal studies on so-called procedural theories of natural law and justice juxtaposed with classical theories of human law and justice. In Kant's philosophical narrative the intellect/reason substituted human nature as the place of seeking for universal norms. That way the practical reason ceased to be merely an instrument of discovery and was elevated to the status of the source of knowledge itself. His transcendental idealism led him to the seminal conclusion that „we cannot cognize things in themselves” and we are subjected to the illusion of appearances positioned in the time and space. This altered western philosophers' way of viewing the world by proposing the revolutionary thesis that it is not the mind which conforms to the objects around it but it is objects which conform to the nature of the mind. This view stamped the philosophical tradition with intellectualism and moral sensibility with far-reaching effects: „external objects (bodies) are merely appearances, hence also nothing other than a species of my representations, whose objects are something only through these representations, but are nothing separated from them. Thus external things exist as well as my self, and indeed both exist on the immediate testimony of my self-consciousness, only with this difference: the representation of my Self, as the thinking subject is related merely to inner sense, but the representations that designate extended beings are also related to outer sense.”

The reasoning and the celebration of abstract reflection led him on the one hand to desperate constataion that we as the humans know little about surrounding world („We can only cognize objects in space and time, appearances. We cannot cognize things in themselves”) though Kant still left the door open for a hope to overcome lack of cognizance by concluding „we can think about things in themselves using the categories” On the one hand, Kant undermined our previous perception of the world by raising the role of the intellect in the process of understanding to the levels of significance unknown before. Kant's moment petrified our western mode of thinking in the West based on rationality and ethical discourse. At the same time he started the tradition of deontological systems of ethics and morality whereby the internal duty was more important than anything else. The Kantian legacy of using practical reason as a guidebook resonated well with the Western political and moral tradition of and his procedural theories of natural law and found inherited by the prominent followers. Rawls wrote „Theory of Justice” in 1971 in which he presented his thought

experiment in and expanded it in subsequent essays and books. In his thought experiment Rawls believed he created optimal conditions for the members of society due to the way the founding of 2 principles of the social order was designed. It was proposed that they were created behind the veil of ignorance and according to the difference principle. The veil of ignorance was the hypothetical situation where nobody was aware of its own social status, gender, race. This would guarantee neutrality/fairness of people concurring on the new principles since everybody being uncertain of his position in the newly created society would have opted for the fairest social contract benefitting the most disadvantaged members (difference principle). This ignorance at the creation was the Rawls's contribution to the political fight where the political order was to be designed to the benefit of the worst off in the democratic way. In Rawls's intellectual experiment there were reflected the contractualist tradition of Enlightenment and moral prescriptions of Kant evoking his famous altruism enclosed in the notions of moral and categorical imperatives.

The significance of Rawls' theory, a neoKantian follower and enthusiast of social contract tradition, adopted and adjusted Kantian moralism into a modern conception of justice called – *justices as fairness*.

He also resolved the tension between these two antiethical terms by proposing two principles concocted behind the hypothetical *veil of ignorance* and based on the difference principle. These conditions were supposed to guarantee the fair choice of society. They were the equality of opportunities and equal claim to rights – they were the terms for accepting inequalities in democratic society and the source of its legitimacy. As he pointed:

Rawls conception was rooted in deep moralism. All other approaches based on procedural theories of natural law shared this propensity for justice and fairness. They did not trace the theories of law and justice from human nature but linked them with objective sets of conditions constructed in human mind to be fulfilled to have good and fair laws.

Theories of human nature constituted one source of law and morality in the Western culture. The second source was the reference to religion/metaphysics and was completely abstract. It was envisaged, for example, in Robert Filmer's famous book which was attacked fiercely in opening chapters of John Locke's „Second Treaties on the Government“. The Enlightenment epoch undermined this metaphysical referencing significantly by setting stage for the rationalism and common sense. The third source was the school of legal positivism represented for example by Hart. But even this source of legal and moral norms was revoking something higher than only human whimsical perspective. Ronald Dworkin was the modern age philosopher who pointed to the difficulties of relying only on *judge made law*. He created the conception of *rules and policies* rooted in normative structures of the society which supplemented

the legal norms found in the written law and were applied in cases where written law norms were missing.

The renaissance of classical theories of human law and morality found its proponents in the Western world again.

## STATE-SPONSORED EVIL ACTIONS AND BAD INTENTIONS

On the other hand, authoritarian governments are free from such ballast. Due to the nature of authoritarian system they can evoke extralegal measures, do not need to cling to the legal norms and are not bound by any moral scruples. The accumulated multiple evidences testify to it. In the peak of the pandemic originating in China the country was hacking Western institutions, driving the wedge among members of the EU, advancing anti-American propaganda war and exploiting ruthlessly coronavirus to weaken the West. Absent were any moral/ethical scruples. At the same time treating its own herded society like a farm animal under controlled conditions. When coronavirus tested the solidarity of the human kind in an hour of trial Chinese hackers attacked computers in the West stealing secrets. In one case, state-sponsored Advanced Persistent Threat 41 (ATP41) compromised a major private provider of social care services in the UK disrupting the systems. As European countries were hurtling towards the most severe moments of Covid 19 China and Russia were targeting technical companies stealing anonymised patient data. Indiscriminate and widespread cyber attacks conducted by hackers sponsored by China led eventually to indictments by US government of two Chinese hackers attacking AI and cancer research company. The investigations revealed the link between Chinese ATP hackers and the Ministry of State Security. On another occasion, western governments pointed to Cozy Bear, a group of hackers formally known as ATP29 believed to be working on behalf of Russian state.

Another instance of hostile intentions is Chinese intentional engagement as the primary source of illicit trafficking of fentanyl and fentanyl-related substances to the West to destroy the fabric of western societies. In fact, for many years now China is also leading a war-like operation to provide drugs to the American and European market as if to take revenge for the Opium Wars of 1840th and demolish social order. The seriousness of the Chinese attacks was encapsulated well in the words of Attorney General:

„We know that the global fentanyl supply chain, which ends with the deaths of Americans, often starts with chemical companies in China,” said Attorney General Merrick B. Garland. “The gathered material led the Justice Department to unsealing indictments against China-based companies and their employees in July and October 2020 with crimes relating to fentanyl and methamphetamine production, distribution

of synthetic opioids. The indictments were unsealed in the Middle District and the Southern District of Florida. Indictments unsealed in the Southern District of Florida included also defrauding the U.S. Postal Service as well as making and using counterfeit postage.

„Fentanyl is the deadliest drug threat our nation has ever faced. These eight cases are the result of DEA's efforts to attack the fentanyl supply chain where it starts — in China. Chinese chemical companies are fueling the fentanyl crisis in the United States by sending fentanyl precursors, fentanyl analogues, xylazine, and nitazenes into our country and to Mexico. These chemicals are used to make fentanyl and make it especially deadly”.

## THE INVASION OF EVIL – AGAMBEN'S APPROACH

We can talk today about a sort of invasion of evil influences by authoritarian governments hiding their hostile intentions under the guise of nationalism and patriotism. In reality these governments are run single-handedly or by groups of interests using today various instruments of power-exercising and power-building – among them biopolitics and the state of exception (external threat). These themes were elaborated in books by Giorgio Agamben who analyzed how the contemporary governments transform the biopolitics to control masses of society and how the declarations of state of exception is abused by the governments to increase the oppressive power. Agamben commented extensively on the works by Carl Schmidt, Hannah Arendt, Michel Foucault. His polemic with prominent 20th century intellectuals served to ponder the human condition and the state of society. Debating with the writings of Carl Schmidt he discussed how the governments are using the state of exception to warrant the increasing surveillance of the society (*State of Exception*. Homo Sacer II, 2003), by referring to Foucault's biopolitics he showed the biological dimension to controlling population (*Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, 1995) and by discussing the arguments in Arendt's books he confronted the vestiges of totalitarianism.

The current politics in Russia evoking constant external threat, passing the act on Foreign Agents, sending assassins to kill political opponents only shows the accuracy of Agamben's theoretical threads on a state of exception and resembles the situation from accumulation of power in Adolf Hitler's Enabling Act of 1933. The strategy of incarcerating and forcefully vaccinating the whole society proved the biopolitics' sociotechniques of biological control tested. Previously, it was seen in the Chinese government's policy of one child the establishment of social credit policy which can even affect young men's bids to find sexual partners.

## MANAGING ACHILLES' HEELS THROUGH 3 DES – DE-RISKING, DECOUPLING, DEDOLLARIZATION AND INTERNATIONALIZATION STRATEGY

Beside the strategy to weaken physically and morally the Western world China and Russia are pursuing the de-risking strategy which has its financial, technological ramification in order to reduce dependence on other countries. In *Made in China 2025* China outline its blueprint for bulding self-sufficiency in key sectors such as semiconductors, AI, clean tech and fin tech.

China practically closed the access to its banking sector (foreign investors controlling now less than 2 percent of Chinese bank assets) and protects its financial markets (with foreigners owning only 4 percent of Chinese stocks and 9 percent of Chinese government debt) and restricting the movements of funds out and in of the country.

To shore up its financial transactions resilience China launched also the UnionPay system of financial services network belonging to the state, controlled by the People's Bank of China upon approval from the State Council which serves as a political overseer of all state functions and law implementation. The Union Pays cards are an alternative to Western card systems (Visa, American Express) and are accepted in 180 countries and issued in 70 countries – becoming only the second to the Visa brand with a 32% of market share.

In a bid to protect itself against financial sanctions China erected an alternative to SWIFT (Society of Worldwide Financial Transactions) global payment system CIPS (the Cross-Border Interbank Payment System) to bypass sanctions after witnessing for years what deals Iran went through since 2012 when the sanction regime was implemented on the country for uranium enrichment program as part of the development nuclear weapons.

Another aspect was to diminish its transaction link to dolar by transacting with renminbi currency thus lessening its dependence on Western financial system.

In this way China is creating a new system of oil trading. This idea was materialized with establishing of Shanghai Trade Exchange which started to trade in yuan denominated futures and recently it settled first cross border trade in yuan. This is the further process of internationalizing the Chinese currencies by carrying out transactions in digital renminbi.

In the political sense, China also embarked on the consolidating the bloc of unstable countries forming them into revisionist group called Brics states which on the one hand seeks to decrease its dependence on old colonial powers on the other hand it serves as the instrument of undermining the traditional architecture of post-Bretton Woods and Washington consensus.

## SOURCES OF LEGITIMACY IN CHINA – HISTORY AND A „CONFUCIAN LENINISM”

The overwhelming support of Chinese population for its government lies firstly in historical experience and secondly in traditional confucian values systems. The differences in outlook with the Western tradition are clear. The Confucian values of „relationship” (*guanxi*), „filial piety” and „saving the face” fitted well for the purpose of awing the society. They were first used by emperors to awe the society in the old times and are being employed now to pacify the people and stabilize the political and social situation. The idea of piety, collective urge and fear of ostracism by loosing the face became ideal instruments for control and oppression by the Chinese government for naming and shaming the pacified people. The Communist governors achieved with the Communist threats the goal of continuing what the ancient absolute rulers did in China by assuming the divine aura. Today the divine element is missing but replaced by the similar mechanism of overpowering the mental capacities of the Chinese subjects – and the similar effect of brainwashing is accomplished like in the past. The underdeveloped state of society maintained for very long time and agrarian origins of the majority of people are facilitating the political passivity and enslavement of the society. It helped to dull the senses and dampened the critical thinking. Whether at the imperial times or now, the Chinese lost – as Socrates would put it – *thaumazein* (wonder)<sup>20</sup> or curiosity to ask questions critically what was the building bloc in Western society responsible for the Enlightenment movement and political advancements. What is worse, the evolutionary processes (emancipated) emancipated the traditional values of the system which lost its metaphysical appeal and pedagogical function. In China today majority of people do not follow rules out of deep-seated moral convictions distinguishing good things from sins. The internal moral imperative of upholding values has disappeared. Chinese follow rules either afraid of legal consequences (of being caught when breaking the norms) or out of utilitarian motivations (I do it because it is useful for me). There is nothing universal and transcendental anymore in the Chinese system of values today – the system is upheld based on personal choice, transactional motivation (I will obey the norm and get what I need) and personal utilitarian interest. The regime has reduced the Chinese society in its collective and individual capacity to the vegetative state of atrophy as far as the critical thinking, moral sensibility and questioning of

<sup>20</sup> J. Llewelyn, „On the saying that philosophy begins in *thaumazein*”, *A Journal of Art, Context and Enquiry* Issue 4 (2001), pp. 48-57, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/20711438> [accessed: 16.03.2024].

„Wonder is the only beginning of philosophy”, Plato has Socrates say these words at 155d of the *Theaetetus*. Aristotle says the same in *Metaphysics* (982b).

reality are concerned. Richard Bernstein, a long time correspondent in China, characterized these attitudes in the following way: „These attitudes should be blamed less on a lack of knowledge than on a public environment that tends to dull the moral sense. Jung Chan, author of „Wild Swans”, observed years ago that even before the terror of the Cultural Revolution „many people had been reduced to a state where they did not dare even to think.”<sup>21</sup>

In another paragraph he deplores: „In Tibet, some 150 Buddhist monks have immolated themselves in the last few years to protest China’s harsh rule, but even for Chinese who know about these events there are no emotionally riveting pictures, no concrete identities. The deaths are abstractions -- a statistic. Why does this matter? It does since ultimately, the intensifying conflict between China and the liberal-democratic world is not about trade or money, but about values, about the way countries behave in the world. And a country whose capacity for outrage has atrophied can offer no moral compass, no sense of restraint on its government’s exercise of raw, self-interested power.”<sup>22</sup>

This situation of relativism and deprivation of higher theological and eschatological perspective corresponds well with other cultural idiosyncracies indicated by observers. In legal culture, contrary to the American principle of *legalism* (the most outstanding founding principle in the US political landscape next to the principles of *separation of power* and *checks and balances*) Chinese are valuing relativity over absolutism and relationship over laws while the „Western societies tend towards absolutes”<sup>23</sup>. In the case of contract law for example the contract signed *must* be honoured absolutely for the Westerners, for the Chinese the contract signed *should* be respected voluntarily – things are relative. Moreover, insistence on following the law strictly could be interpreted as offensive attitude of mistrust towards the Chinese partner and not treasuring more law over the relationship.<sup>24</sup>

In addition, the Chinese Party created a new paradigm of absolut power deriving legitimacy from history<sup>25</sup>. It enmeshed skillfully Confucian values in the fabric of society erecting a new marxist-leninst paradigm approved by the majority of Chinese society. In this way the system is considered as legitimate and very stable.

<sup>21</sup> R. Bernstein, „Why moral outrage is scarce in China”, Nikkei Asia, 13.11.2019.

<sup>22</sup> Bernstein, *supra* note 1.

<sup>23</sup> M. Chan, „What are the main differences between the values of Westerners and Chinese?”, [http:// quora com](http://quora.com), [accessed: 16.03.2024].

<sup>24</sup> „Chinese Values vs. Western Values: Competition or Dialogue?”, Wilson Center.

<sup>25</sup> Alvin Y. So, *The Rise of Authoritarianism in China in Early 21 st Century*, International Review of Modern Sociology, 2019, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/48636762> [accessed: 16.03.2024]; H. Takeuchi, *Chinese politics and comparative authoritarianism: institutionalization and adaptation for regime resilience*, Japanese Journal of Political Science 2021, Vol. 22, Issue 4, pp. 381-392.

The Marxist-Leninist paradigm bifurcates into two directions: Marxist and Leninist upon which is founded contemporary China. Marxism deals with economic outcomes/results which are directed and guaranteed by the state apparatus even if nominally they have the appearance of capitalism. The state controls every economic activity and supervises the ownership of assets and means of production in the controlled capitalism system. It is thus overcoming the problem of private ownership because all economic assets and production processes are subjugated anyway to the Politburo's decision at the end of the day (in addition to seizing total power, consolidation of elites, information gathering)<sup>26</sup>. The capitalist system and free-market economy are more a lexical-semantic phenomenon than a functioning reality consistent with formal definitions like in the West. And deviation from the Regime system and political correctness ends with punishment and may result with confiscation of private property by calling of extralegal means existing in Chinese legal culture. The extralegal dimension of law order (state of exception) is characteristic for all authoritarian regimes and has reminiscences of the Enabling Act of 1933 – the law was passed by Reichstag and equipped Adolf Hitler with the power to make and enforce laws according to the needs and exigencies without any control from the German parliament (the theory of emergency laws was concocted by Carl Schmitt and still applies in many authoritarian ecosystems)

The Leninist thread of the paradigm deals with the full control of the society symbolized by the *social credit score system*, labor camps and the electronic surveillance of citizens. This marxist-leninist system of power was entangled with the traditional value system of social harmony, benevolence and respect for appropriate hierarchy which instills the system with legitimacy, collective acceptance.

The socialist core values of Confucian socialist republic as was termed by the New Left philosopher are Chinese phenomenon rendered the process of „confucionising” the communist party by introducing tenets of Confucianism into educational and moral model distorting and adopting the traditional concepts and imbuing it with new meanings. The value of loyally serving to the society and the group was replaced with the obedience to the communist party which sits at the top of social hierarchy constituting the cornerstone of social and political fabric.

It also overcomes the dilemma of combining antithetical concepts of strict hierarchy and equality which seem to be incompatible in Western societies founded on cherished notions of egalitarianism and individualism. The Confucian set of rules permits to reconcile competing claims of strict hierarchy and equality by imposing on people contradicted concepts (irrational contradictions).

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<sup>26</sup> H. Takeuchi, *Chinese politics and comparative authoritarianism: institutionalization and adaptation for regime resilience*, Japanese Journal of Political Science 2021, Vol. 22, Issue 4, pp. 381-392.

Ironically, the Chinese do not need also to overcome the dilemma of freedom and equality which in the Western political thought was reconciled by John Rawls with his idea of „justice as fairness” since they both nominally exist – the freedom is strictly defined and distributed by the state and equality is imposed by the Communist Party. What is interesting for the Western observers the Marxist ideology despite decades of state capitalism and attributes of market economy still enjoys popularity in China as evidenced by tv programs and public opinion surveys indicating the government enjoying the popular support. The Communist Party subjugated the whole society by enmeshing the ideology with nationalism thus creating a false sense of patriotism and setting up traps for the dissidents.

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## AMONG WEAKNESSES, SENSIBILITIES AND VULNERABILITIES: THE WEST’S COGNITIVE SOURCES OF THE SELF

### Abstract

The article’s purpose is to identify and describe briefly the pronounced features of the Western thinking stemming from the philosophical, religious and political traditions which run a different course in comparison with the Eastern patterns (Middle Eastern and Asian). The thesis proposed is that the differences are irreconcilable but manageable. The article’s thesis is that the current escalation of tensions in the world accompanied by the uptick of enthusiasm for authoritarian forms of governance are a transitional phenomenon stemming from the intellectual crisis in the West, institutional inadequacies, the enrichment of new social classes and the replacement of old elites with new ones. The text is outlining the weaknesses of the West symbolized by Hamlet’s syndrome as well as abstract modern paradigms of analysis proposed by various philosophical schools which undermined the existing orders not offering much.

**Keywords:** Western democratic tradition, Western overintellectualism as the source of weakness, “Kantian revolution” in thinking, authoritarian tendencies, sources of Chinese conduct

## SŁABI, ROMANTYCZNI I NADWRAŻLIWI: KOGNITYWNE PRAŹRÓDŁA POLITYCZNEJ TOŻSAMOŚCI ZACHODU

### Streszczenie

Celem opracowania jest przedstawienie i krótka analiza wyraźnych cech zachodniego myślenia wynikających z tradycji filozoficznych, religijnych i politycznych, które są odmienne od wzorców wschodnich (bliskowschodnich i azjatyckich). Zaproponowana teza głosi, że różnice te są nie do pogodzenia, ale można nimi zarządzać. Myślą

przewodnią opracowania jest to, że obecna eskalacja napięć na świecie, której towarzyszy wzrost entuzjazmu dla autorytarnych form rządów, jest przejściowym fenomenem wynikającym z kryzysu intelektualnego na Zachodzie, niedoskonałości instytucjonalnych, wzbogacenia się nowych klas społecznych i zastąpienia starych elit nowymi. Tekst podkreśla słabości Zachodu symbolizowane przez syndrom Hamleta, a także abstrakcyjne nowoczesne paradygmaty analizy proponowane przez różne szkoły filozoficzne, które podważają istniejące porządki, jednak w zamian nie mają wcale wiele do zaoferowania.

**Słowa kluczowe:** zachodnia tradycja i demokracja, zachodnie przeintelektualizowanie jako źródło słabości, „rewolucja kantowska” w myśleniu, tendencje autorytarne, źródła i przyczyny postępowania Chińczyków