Liberalism and the Conflict of Traditions

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"Liberalism"—or whatever the word meant at the time—was a frequently discussed topic in the early 1990s. Jerzy Szacki's work *Liberalism after Communism* was one of many opinionated pieces of the era, but it was a special one. Szacki relied on his expertise as a sociologist and a historian of ideas in his attempt to diagnose the condition of liberalism in Poland, and indirectly also in Eastern Europe. Therefore, on the one hand, the aforementioned book—in contrast to various contemporary publications—is not a journalistic work or a political essay, and its purpose is not a direct social or political intervention. On the other hand, it is not simply a political or philosophical treatise on the theory of liberalism, because the author is interested in a public discourse set in a very specific geopolitical space. Because of this context, we are able to accurately determine the purpose of Szacki's dissertation. In my opinion, the main goal of *Liberalism after Communism* is to identify the real problems of liberalism

in Poland in the early 90s, in a situation that the author describes as a time of confusion, with a widespread misunderstanding of liberalism itself, as well as of its issues. Defending the liberal solutions in the context of Political Theory (because the author presents a favourable attitude towards political liberalism) is lower on Szacki's list of priorities and takes up slightly less space, although it is clearly still important. Thus, *Liberalism after Communism* focuses primarily on the diagnosis of the state of Polish liberalism, but also contains arguments in favour of some of its aspects.

I would like to discuss the arguments found in *Liberalism after Communism*, and how accurate and valid they are today from the perspective of the last 24 years in the history of Poland's political conflict, with the "democratic state of law," and the changes in theoretical awareness. This analysis will allow me to improve and develop the findings of my own work,[1] which is devoted to, among other topics, the problems connected with the functioning of the so-called strong traditions in a liberal democracy. The general theory of tradition, which I refer to in the following paragraphs, relies heavily on the findings of Jerzy Szacki.[2] At the same time, I believe this reflection may allow us to decide whether Szacki's suggested definition was correct, regarding the real problems facing political liberalism in Poland.

Jerzy Szacki on the rules for resolving the conflict of traditions in liberal democracy

In the eyes of Jerzy Szacki, liberalism in itself, or "simply" liberalism, is a political construct. It is a political theory concerning the organizational foundations for a state of free citizens, confined within the classical texts on the idea of liberalism. It is all but impossible to find the "definition" of liberalism itself anywhere in Liberalism after Communism, and its author does not deal with the classification of Polish "liberals" and "liberalisms" according to how they abide by the principles of such a definition. However, some fragments of the book and its internal structure allow us to reconstruct Szacki's reasoning in the following way: there is no deeply

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[1]   P. Grad, *O pojęciu tradycji. Studium krytyczne kultury pamięci* (*On the Concept of Tradition. A Critical study of the Culture of Remembrance*), August Cieszkowski Foundation, Warszawa 2017.

[2]   J. Szacki, *Tradycje* (*Traditions*), Wydawnictwa Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, Warszawa 2011.

rooted liberal tradition in Poland, i.e. there is no tradition of liberal political thought. Rather, we have a tradition of anti-communist opposition, which we can call "protoliberal." In order to recognize it as a preparatory stage for true liberalism, we might refer to the fact that:

> … any critical thinking about communism revitalized the classic subjects of liberal thought, even if the critic knew little about liberalism and/or was biased against it.[3]

The Polish variant of "protoliberalism" had several fundamental and general principles in common with classical liberalism. Unfortunately, according to Szacki, this protoliberal preparatory stage did not evolve into one which would have been the grounds for shaping a mature Polish liberal thought. Liberalism itself began to be associated mainly with economic liberalism once the PRL (the People's Republic of Poland) had been dissolved (marking the end of actual democratic opposition). Szacki admits that numerous political liberals saw the reconstruction of the economy as the grounds for creating a true liberal political awareness[4]—ultimately, therefore, the economic liberalism was at least a temporary "preparation" for political liberalism. However, it was still not a "proper liberalism" or "simply" liberalism, i.e. political liberalism. Thus, when Szacki published his book in 1994, he did not see such liberalism in the political future of our country.[5]

It must be noted that, from the perspective of its main subject, the protoliberalism of the democratic opposition was actually a "proper liberalism" or a political liberalism, even with its flaws. In addition to the above-mentioned generality (the lack of specific features and efficiency that is characteristic of a developed "liberal political theory"), Szacki mentioned its other serious shortcomings. First, it put the state and society in binary opposition to each other. This seemed to be a one-sided awareness of the anti-communist opposition, somehow petrified in the framework of a general political doctrine, where real life happened outside the state structures. Secondly, it was distinguished by economic naivety. Ideologists of "anti-policy politics" were experts in ethics, not economics; and the precarious balance among the dominant economic ideas of the 1990s can also probably

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[3]   J. Szacki, *Liberalizm po komunizmie*, Znak, Stefan Batory Foundation, Kraków 1994, s. 91 (translation—Chester A. Kisiel, *Liberalism after Communism*, Budapest: Central European University Press, 1995, p. 74).

[4]   Ibidem, p. 155.

[5]   Ibidem, p. 252.

be attributed to this negligence. Finally, according to Szacki, there was a widespread myth of internal unity in the democratic opposition circles. I think this had much in common with the other issues: where there are two moral opponents, there is no room for further diversification in the sphere of an ethical conflict (as opposed to a technical, e.g. economic, conflict of interests) between the state and its society. Civil society is a cultural community of "decent" people who oppose the "totalitarian" dogmas.[6] Jerzy Szacki was not afraid to call this attitude a liberal one.

> The most utopian feature of this view of society was not that it postulated a temporary suspension of internal conflicts in the face of a common enemy, something which is well-grounded in social psychology; rather, its utopianism lay in the assumption that these conflicts, including conflicts connected with the distribution of social wealth, and timeless ethnic, national and religious conflicts, could be eliminated permanently.[7]

Among the three flaws of protoliberalism, it seems that the third defect (resulting from the other two)—i.e. the myth of lasting moral unity based on basic and clear principles—was also the greatest one. I will put forth a claim that mature political liberalism, in the form which Jerzy Szacki defends in his book, is an actual inheritor of this great defect of anti-communist protoliberalism.

The last chapter of Szacki's book is devoted to answering the question of whether political liberalism even exists in Poland (indeed, dedicating the final chapter to political liberalism also suggests that this is the proper liberalism everything in the book alludes to). It is interesting that this chapter focuses primarily on analysing the problem of the possibility of political liberalism taking root in a country with strong Catholic traditions. The discussion on the state of political liberalism in Poland is functionally also an analysis of anti-liberal Catholic polemics. This is also part of Szacki's diagnosis: Catholic tradition (i.e. Catholic political culture) is the main source of resistance to the liberal tradition in Poland. Of course, the author of Tradycje (Traditions) recognizes the efforts of authors such as Father Maciej Zięba and Mirosław Dzielski in attempting to reduce this resistance. However, the question of whether political liberalism can be

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[6] "Generally speaking, the basis of a civil society was to be formed through the recognition of a common cultural identity of its members, with no regard to economic infrastructure," Ibidem, p. 128.

[7] Ibidem, p. 135 (translation—Chester A. Kisiel, *Liberalism after Communism*, Budapest: Central European University Press, 1995, p. 109).

somehow reconciled with Catholic tradition remains open.[8] Furthermore, at one point Szacki notes that even the two Catholic authors who perhaps tried hardest to welcome liberalism in Poland after 1989 were unable to recognize the foundation of liberal democracy. The author talks about Father Maciej Zięba and Father Józef Tischner, and stresses the fact that they also postulated the establishment of a democratic political community around a positive, substantive concept of the common good.

Here, we see the main element of the modest defence of political liberalism which Szacki presents in his book. He is convinced that the basic principle of liberalism in general, and a sort of special stage for a dispute between liberals and their (mostly Catholic) opponents in Poland, is the postulate that the state in its laws and institutions should not "decree" anything as "good," leaving it solely to the conscience of citizens.[9] According to Szacki, the state has the right to a certain vision of what good is, but cannot impose it on the entire political community through political solutions. These are the limits to the conflict of traditions: no tradition (in the sense of a specific vision of a good life) can become a political tradition, and nothing can be politically decreed to be "good."

Criticism of Jerzy Szacki's understanding of liberalism

I propose that this understanding of liberalism is internally contradictory, and that it also presupposes a false understanding of the notions of tradition, the common good, and the political (and liberal) community.

The author's claim is connected with the argument[10] that liberalism does not imply the "annulment of moral problems," as its opponents would often try to label it, but only transfers them to a private and pre-political sphere. Politics would only deal with technical matters and the organization of a peaceful coexistence of various traditions, but not with ethics or "the good." Thus, "Liberals take a clearly minimalistic position

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[8] Ibidem, p. 241.

[9] Ibidem, p. 243.

[10] "By refusing to take a position on the common good, liberalism by no means tries to invalidate moral problems. Liberalism only states that in modem society these problems are resolved in many different ways and whatever one thinks about individual solutions, it cannot be otherwise." (Ibidem, p. 244); (translation—Chester A. Kisiel, *Liberalism after Communism*, Budapest: Central European University Press, 1995, p. 198).

based on the conviction that no perfect community can be rebuilt today on a national scale (if such a community ever existed)."[11]

This argument is certainly sufficient to dismiss the imprecise accusation of "invalidating morals," which describes a complete disregard for ethical principles. However, it is insufficient to dismiss the accusations against the idea of liberal political community adopted by Szacki; it is not enough to dismiss the allegation of inconsistent attitude towards "the good" as defined by the political community.

Even if we accept that the liberal perception of a political community does not have to represent a "perfect community" (i.e. based on a coherent and holistic vision of a good life), it does not solve the problem that there actually is a need to define those kinds of "goods" the political community should strive to protect. It seems highly unlikely that even a liberal "minimum" policy aimed at ensuring peace and freedom for the state's citizens could be fully implemented without defining at least one set of basic goods. In fact, this is how it was done in the history of liberal political practice: "human rights" and fundamental citizens' rights are examples of such goods. Regardless of the issue of the dogmatic justification, it is difficult to say why exactly is it impossible to define liberalism simply as a postulate that restricts politics to the defence of such basic goods. If one wanted to delve deeper into this justification, one could say that in the opinion of their defenders (including, I believe, all liberals), the basic goods are a result of the very fact of human existence—thus, they are not acquired goods or goods achieved through participation in some practices (such as improving oneself within the framework of a given tradition); rather, they are somehow related to being human.

I have decided to leave aside the problem of the "metaphysical" or "post-metaphysical" justification of such goods, because it does not affect the liberal basic values being called as such. In the end, the radical, nihilist anti-metaphysicians are not inclined to also represent the liberals, and post--metaphysical liberals (e.g. Kantian republicans such as Habermas or liberal ironists like Rorty) can use the notion of "the good" even if its justification is not metaphysical (i.e. it is based on the recognition of certain natural obligations rather than properties).

Within this context, the real dispute between the liberals and their opponents, especially those who emerged from the Catholic tradition,

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[11] Ibidem, p. 246 (translation—Chester A. Kisiel, *Liberalism after Communism*, Budapest: Central European University Press, 1995, p. 200).

stems from the question of whether non-basic goods, which define a "perfect community," should be decided upon by political means. It does not, however, relate at all to the matter of decreeing any and all kinds of goods. Referring to the famous text by Czesław Miłosz (1991) (which Szacki also refers to), it can be said that the dispute about the "religious state" cannot simply concern the issue of "decreeing the goods," because there are (according to the liberals) goods (basic goods) which are recognized outside of certain "creeds." The concept of a political community that is not inclined towards any specific good, but only focused on the protection of the freedom and well-being of its citizens, seems to be contradictory by nature. In order to resolve this contradiction, Szacki would have to show that it is possible to build a "minimal" political community without establishing the definition of basic goods. However, he does not do this; and in fact, no one has ever achieved it. It seems impossible, according to what our common sense tells us about the concepts of "the good" and political community, and how they are understood.

The real conflict between the "strong tradition" and liberalism will therefore only appear if such a tradition attempts to expand the political community's range of goods beyond the basic goods. I think this situation has rarely occurred, if at all, in the history of the Third Polish Republic. Regarding the disputes of "liberals" with the supporters of the "religious state," it seems that in most cases the dispute concerns whether some specific good in question is actually basic, rather than whether there should be an attempt at turning a pluralistic political community into a "perfect community" organized around the assurance of a specific, non-basic good.

This was certainly the case with bioethical disputes, primarily concerning abortion, for example. "Defenders of the right to live" tried to prove that we were dealing with a human being immediately from the moment of conception, and therefore this human being's life should be under protection—which is one of the basic goods. One can debate if their arguments were correct and well-founded, but there is no doubt that the attempt to discredit this line of thought as simply "religious" was misguided. Catholics consider a foetus' status to be legitimate and natural, not theological, and understandable through reason, rather than revealed as part of an enlightenment. They approach this matter within the rules of liberal discussion, and at the same time they do not reject the label of "defenders of life." The only real dispute that actually took place concerned the question whether the Catholics were right about the idea of a human life existing from conception—not whether they violated the principles of liberal political discussion in their attempt to enforce the principles of

a "ruling tradition." Expecting that people who consider a foetus a human being would surrender its legal right to live would require a certain level of logical inconsistency. One cannot do this in the context of a debate in a liberal public space. In this situation, the only expected outcome of the discussion was the participants' attempt to resolve the arguments regarding the status of a conceived child, instead of painting a picture that the way the debate had been conducted was incorrect.

Bioethical issues are simply an example, but a very significant one. The spark which ignited a heated dispute over the "religious state" could be taken as a similar example. It originated from the issue of so-called Christian values being included in the body of the Broadcasting Act in 1992. A provision was made which stated that public radio and television should "respect the Christian system of values, taking universal ethics as its basis."[12] Again, such a record may be argued against for many different reasons, but it is difficult to prove that it strikes at the liberal principle of not decreeing specific goods (treated as one of the competing visions of a good life) by means of the law. Firstly, although the concept of Christian values has not been clearly defined, this phrase usually means a set of general basic values which are included in the canon of humanistic values. Thus, Christian values typically include elements such as "human dignity," "respect for others," or "respect for human work," not "worship of the Blessed Sacrament," or the "doctrine of the two natures of Christ." The lack of a definition of legal Christian values constitutes a formal flaw of this law, but it has nothing to do (in itself) with violating the neutrality of the state. Secondly, we are talking about respecting, not promoting or propagating: therefore, what is really decreed here is the respect for a pre-political religious tradition, not a specific understanding of one of the goods. It is reasonable to argue that such respect is actually included within the principles of the liberal state of law, and in this case, it simply takes an explicit form in its relation to Christianity. Thirdly and most importantly, the basis for this respect is set in the "universal principles of ethics," which means that the goods of the Christian tradition are protected only to the extent that any basic goods, i.e. universally understood goods, would be. This example also presents a case where the real dispute did not concern whether the introduction of such a provision would violate the principles of a neutral liberal state, but whether it was (for reasons other than the principles of liberal democracy) necessary and advisable.

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[12] The Broadcasting Act of 29 December 1992 (Journal of Laws of 1993, no. 7, item 34, announced) Article 21, Paragraph 2, Subparagraph 6.

These reservations only suggest that the ongoing debate should be redefined. It is not a dispute over the need for morality but over the possibility and limits of politics. In this dispute, liberals take a clearly minimalistic position based on the conviction that no perfect community can be rebuilt today on a national scale (if such a community ever existed). This being so, one has to accept diversity and plurality, discovering as many of their good sides as possible and improving principles of behaviour which preserve social peace and equilibrium in the existing conditions without resorting to methods of government that threaten the liberty of the individual.[13]

This summary by Szacki clearly presents the established principles of internally coherent political liberalism, but unfortunately, it does not apply to the way the dispute over Polish liberalism was acknowledged by Szacki, and by a significant number of Polish liberals. It is true that liberals are abandoning their plans to build (or rebuild) a "perfect community;" however, no one in Poland has truly tried to create it yet. Let me repeat that by "community" I mean one that is based around the "common good," which is a specific set of goods of a given tradition, describing human life as a whole. It is meaningful to speak of a perfect community only when its law (also reflected in its doctrine and customs) has the ambition to describe the "good life" model in its entirety. In order to do this, it is insufficient to simply indicate the basic goods necessary for human life to continue and develop as "human life," but not as a "good life." Behind this belief, one finds the assumption that the "good life," or perfect life, is not simply human life: it is known and recalled (though in a somewhat confusing way, I think) by Giorgio Agamben when he makes the distinction between dzoe and bios. To "live well" (bios) does not mean to just live, although it is obviously a prerequisite for a good life. Plainly living (a human life) is limited to the provision of basic goods. The political community, in the liberal sense, is that which must guarantee this fulfilment, and this also constitutes its main goal. There is a certain technique which gives such a plain life (dzoe) a form that makes it a good and perfect life (bios). We call it "tradition," and this requires the identification of more specific goods.

When the political community is also a community of such a tradition, we are able to really call it a "perfect political community." Nevertheless, in the history of the Third Polish Republic, and perhaps even earlier than that, there have been no plans to build such a community.

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[13] J. Szacki, *Liberalizm po komunizmie*, s. 246 (translation—Chester A. Kisiel, *Liberalism after Communism,* Budapest: Central European University Press, 1995, p. 200).

Once the country had regained its independence in 1989, there were many arguments over the understanding and scope of basic goods, but hardly anyone argued about whether a "perfect community" or "religious state" should even be established. In fact, the real dispute between liberals and their opponents does not concern the "need for morality," but "the boundaries of politics." Not all disagreements between the "liberals" and their opponents were of such a nature, of course. It was a more common occurrence to witness a fairly normal, internal political dispute (and thus not related to its boundaries) over the understanding of basic goods, the guarantee of which should be agreed (without taking extremes into account) by both the "liberals" and their opponents.

Tradition in the public sphere of a liberal democracy

I would like to correct the findings of my work, called *O pojęciu tradycji* (*On Tradition*), here. The conclusion of my work presented a slight inclination towards a generally outlined "agonistic" understanding of the liberal public sphere, the task of which would be limited to creating conditions for the controlled conflict of various traditions.[14] It is worth noting that contrary to what I might have suggested, I did not discuss the liberal state (liberal democracy) in that work, because I had decided to focus on the liberal public sphere. My agonistic scheme of the liberal public sphere was simply an attempt to transfer the model of a tradition dispute to the social level, which Alasdair MacIntyre described for moral inquiry traditions.[15] One of the most important elements of this model is the distinction between two modes:

- a discussion within a community of traditions, where all (and only) the assumptions contained in the doctrine of a given tradition can be accepted as data,
- a discussion outside such a community, where the perspective of a given tradition should be presented as better than a viewpoint on the same issues by another tradition which tries to describe them on the basis of completely different assumptions. This ad extra

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[14] P. Grad, *op. cit.*, p. 259.

[15] Ibidem, p. 261.

discussion, therefore, cannot be based on the data derived from the doctrinal assumptions of a given tradition, but rather, one must demonstrate their greater efficiency in describing moral problems. This is possible under the condition of minimal translation between life forms, i.e. the presumption of participation in a kindred human nature.[16]

       If we use this very simplified model, we can also add that the function of the public sphere, in which different traditions compete, should also include indicating common goods which are common to all the traditions. These goods can then be treated as the goods of the entire political community (including pluralistic traditions), and at the same time, they may be used as a basis for the preservation of its existence and keeping the peace. However, they will not be enough to ensure a perfect life or to create a perfect community. Moreover, it can be assumed that the specific goods' definition will not be clear or easily acceptable by all; and among the competing traditions, there will be a dispute over which goods can be regarded as basic goods of the entire political community. Indeed, the identification and indication of basic goods is the fundamental act of self-definition for a political community.

       The emphasis on the need to identify basic goods is not particularly common among liberal theorists, but it is certainly not incompatible with the principles of classical liberal theory. Stephen Holmes, arguing with the critics of liberalism in a fairly superficial but extensive way, admits that the concept of good, and even the common good, is not unknown to liberalism.[17] It is symptomatic that Holmes understands "liberalism" as a set of views of various authors, including Spinoza, Milton, Locke, Montesquieu, Hume, Wolter, Beccaria, Blackstone, Smith, Kant, Madison, Bentham and Milla.[18] This list contains only the names of more "historical" scholars, who were of fundamental significance for the classical liberal theory, but were not as zealous or sceptical towards the concept of "good" as their post-war liberalist, anti-metaphysical counterparts. It can also be assumed that the authors on the list had visions of what "good" was, which might have been quite different to those presented by their colleagues; not to mention the fact that they all expressed opinions that are incompatible

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[16] Ibidem, pp. 244–246.

[17] S. Holmes, *Anatomia antyliberalizmu* (*The Anatomy of Antiliberalism*), Znak, Kraków 1998, p. 268–271.

[18] Ibidem, p. 256

with the liberalism we usually think of (e.g. Locke's view that atheism should be tolerated by the state). It does not change the fact that these authors are important liberal thinkers, or at least intellectual fathers of liberalism who made use of the concept of "the good." We can also find zealous defenders of the concept of the common good[19] among the more contemporary liberal theorists, although they certainly do not represent the majority of this movement.

In my opinion, a question which raises great controversy between the overwhelming majority of liberals and the communities of tradition is whether a society which forms a political community (which is the main focus of liberal theorists' attention) is allowed to include tradition communities that use means of communication, education and practices that involve the participation of authority, discipline, limiting spontaneous tendencies, punishments, exclusion, and even intimidation. According to the traditional anthropology (here in the sense of "attributable to the communities of tradition"), in order to achieve true perfection, a man must adopt such means. They allow a man to shape himself more efficiently, so as to acquire virtues that he would probably be unable to activate by himself if he were only following his "desires." These virtues are deeply rooted in his nature, and are extremely compatible with the man through an established relationship. In short, tradition communities are based on discipline, while liberals accept discipline as a method of early socialization, at most.

It seems that the liberal canon also includes an anthropological vision, which prefers a more "expressive" vision of man, whose perfection is achieved through the "extraction" of his proper identity, rather than "shaping" his persona by the common norms of reason embodied in practices of a community. From this perspective, the discipline characteristics of communities of tradition will seem to the liberals rather "unfair" and "unnatural," because the latter usually adopt the romantic concept of nature. According to liberals, political freedom is supposed to ensure the possibility of such expression and self-realization.

I think that the connection of this anthropological assumption with the project of organizing a political community is more historical and casual in nature, rather than conceptual and indispensable. My reasons for this view arise from the fact that the project of a liberal

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[19] Gilliam A. Galston is an excellent example, as is the book *Cele liberalizmu* (*Liberal Purposes*), transl. A. Pawelec, Znak, Stefan Batory Foundation, Warszawa 1999. In Poland, an important book (for the internal debate on liberalism) is Marcin Król's *Liberalizm strachu czy liberalizm odwagi* (*Liberalism of Fear or Liberalism of Courage*), Znak, Kraków 1996.

state can also be sustained by its goal of ensuring the peaceful existence of various communities with different understandings of perfection, not just as "expressive" and romantic. This is why I believe that the presence of communities of tradition may be compatible with the liberal theoretical minimum, which is the concept of organizing a political community in accordance with the principle of acceptance of actual pluralism and the search for basic goods. Even though they are reconcilable in principle, it does not mean that this presence will not be marked by tensions (because of its history); in addition, the historical dynamics of the development of modern "liberal democracies" may threaten communities of tradition. My book was largely devoted to highlighting the structural determinants of such threats.

Therefore, I assume that the existence of communities of tradition (in the above sense) in a liberal society is in principle not rejected by the rules of liberalism. These traditions can come into conflict with each other in the public sphere, and compete in a discussion about the best understanding of human nature and the vision of "a good life," provided that as they respect the basic goods of the political community, which rely on the preservation of human life. Freedom of access to a given tradition community is also part of the set of goods. These traditions can also represent their views in political discussions in the public sphere, such as speaking out on matters concerning the organization of the life of the entire community, and presenting the opinions of a given tradition.

Such participation must of course be governed by appropriate rules that ensure respect for the fundamental rights of citizens belonging to other traditions, and those "non-affiliated" with any good life tradition. Particularly, this applies to the situation of a society in a liberal state where a given tradition or its various cultural emanations have a dominant position, as is the case with Poland and Catholicism. In such a situation, the dominant tradition naturally makes the biggest contribution to the public debate. The scope of this contribution and its character, as well as the public representation of a given tradition (e.g. the noticeable presence of symbols and religious practices in institutions) is a matter of self-judgement, which must guarantee a show of respect for basic goods. However, the principle of accepting pluralism does not directly mean that the public presence of different traditions must be somehow equal or balanced in a statistical sense (and in extreme cases it is even meant to be utterly free of balance restrictions, in order to guarantee total "equality"). What is important is that none of the traditions in the public sphere should

prevent the representatives of other traditions from making use of the basic goods. Indeed, the thesis that a "neutered" state without any public presence of tradition is itself a "basic good" is highly controversial.

One may also wonder whether such basic goods can only be indicated unanimously (and treated as obvious), or if they can be discussed and determined in a fair manner. If a political community were to function as a reflection of a community of traditions, it would be necessary for it to define a set of goods relevant to that community within itself, and to establish an authority guarding it. Being a member of a given tradition requires the recognition of such a set of goods, even if (within the limits provided by the tradition itself) one can then find oneself arguing about their exact meaning. Similarly, in the case of a political community, discussions on a more accurate understanding of specific goods would be acceptable, but there could be no disagreement over the core of basic goods. Therefore, protracted disputes about "basic goods," even if they are not against the formal principles of liberal democracy (such as the dispute over the human status of a conceived child), are always a source of a serious crisis. Their stake is ultimately (in the event that they cannot be resolved) a violation of the unity of a political community, including the liberal ones. Such communities are defined not only by the procedures necessary for peaceful coexistence, but also by specific, basic goods that are protected by these procedures.

Ultimately, it seems that when diagnosing the situation of political liberalism in Poland in the early 1990s—and thus, above all, by diagnosing obstacles that liberal ideas had to face in Polish Catholic society—Jerzy Szacki makes the same mistake that he himself had pointed out in the worldview of protoliberals, several dozen pages earlier. Specifically, he saw the return of Catholic thought in the acceptance of a dispute about "the limits of politics," and in the details related to the assurance of basic goods.

> … It was a clear sign that Catholic thought in many instances was returning to pre-communist ways of thinking, to the stereotype of Poland as standing aloof from the 'moral corruption of the West', ways of thinking that seemingly had been forgotten, or cast aside for good. For people who had been accustomed to see the Church as the avantgarde of civil society in the Western style, this was a real shock. They now discovered that the most ardent supporters of the Church professed views glaringly in contradiction with their expectations. These Catholics not only were unwilling to enter into a dialogue with people who thought differently, a dialogue that liberals believed would be common practice in a society liberated from communism, but they also professed

the seemingly discredited view that the good can be decreed and put into practice using the machinery of government.[20]

Szacki, while diagnosing one of the parties of the political dispute in Poland, accused it of not understanding the rules of participation in the political community. Such an accusation means that one of the disputing parties is not able to participate in public life; thus, de facto (even if de jure no one has decreed it) it is outside the community. This mechanism was identical to that used by the democratic opposition, as a way of transferring every natural political dispute on the understanding of specific goods to the level of a fundamental dispute about the possibility of even belonging to a political community. Szacki, like many other analysts, was justified to see the origins of this protoliberal habit in the moral dualism of the discourse by the PRL opposition, who were convinced of the necessity to build internal unity, and to oppose the corrupt "politicians" with the morality of citizens in the community. This manner of debating was not exclusive to liberals, but characterized the entire post-solidarity political class. In the case of liberals, however, it was striking due to that fact that all particular disputes over various differentiated goods were perceived as one fundamental dispute; it is difficult to find any common grounds with declarations of having to reconcile with the inevitable discussion and "dialogue" on the scope of fundamental values of the political community.[21]

Polish Liberalism and political conflicts of III RP (Third Polish Republic)

I would now like to focus on Jerzy Szacki's line of argument and its shortcomings, indicated here from the perspective of the general characteristics of the history of political conflicts in the Third Polish Republic. The aforementioned characteristics can only be introduced here briefly, so we

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[20] J. Szacki, *Liberalizm po komunizmie*, s. 237 (translation—Chester A. Kisiel, *Liberalism after Communism*, Budapest: Central European University Press, 1995, p. 193).

[21] Marcin Król noticed this as well, as described in his aforementioned book: "This kind of an attitude is particularly strange for the liberals, because one of its most crucial features is a belief that no public debate is ever harmful, and that it is almost always beneficial. At the same time the participants of the debate have been called intellectual inheritors of Fascism which is a step too far in the eyes of European culture" (id., *op. cit.*, s. 43–44).

shall concentrate on the most important aspects. Nevertheless, I think that presenting the topic here in this form, while relying on the work of other researchers (primarily historians and analysts of the Polish public scene[22]), is sufficient to formulate some non-trivial conclusions about Szacki's diagnoses. At the same time, these conclusions concern not only Liberalism after Communism, but also the shape of Polish liberalism in general; and they may even contribute to the general, liberal political theory.

The first 15 years of the Third Polish Republic—until the fall of the last SLD government in 2005—can be considered a period of clear and true dominance of "liberalism" (in the understanding of Jerzy Szacki) within the pre-political public sphere. The lack of will to formulate substantial accusations, and constant abuse of the procedural ones which decided whether or not one could join a political community in the fight against opponents who did not abide by liberal traditions, was a frequently used way of blocking the real discussion. Those who did not want to enter the liberals' camp were immediately regarded as people who did not understand the nature of democracy, and thus were unable to participate in the public debate. This was accompanied by verbal radicalization, and the growing frustration of the excluded conservative members of the "audience;" these members, although large in number, communicated via the "second category" means of circulating the information: namely, on Radio Maryja, in newspapers devoid of social prestige, or in niche and isolated right-wing intelligentsia circles.

The end of the SLD (Social Democrats) era also meant an increase in the polarization of the public sphere, and the prospect of the PO-PiS coalition even led to the belief that it would be possible to stop the process of antagonism of both the "liberally" and "conservatively" oriented members of the III RP political audience. The leaders of both parties, who had incidentally come from the same opposition circles of Solidarity, understood that from the perspective of the effectiveness of exercising power, it might be unwise to extinguish the moral, Manichean conflict over their affiliation with a political community. The famous words of Prime Minister

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[22] Possibly the only historical synthesis on the history of III RP, *Historia polityczna Polski 1989–2015* [*The Political History of Poland 1989–2015*], *was of particular significance to me* (Kraków 2016). With a decisive role in understanding the moral character of political discussions are the analyses by Paweł Śpiewak, included in his *Pamięci po komunizmie* [*Memories of Communism*] (Gdańsk 2005), especially Chapter IV, "Haters & Preachers." A great deal of interesting information (unfortunately structured in a way that prevents its verification, in my opinion) can be found in the trilogy devoted to the political history of III RP, by Robert Krasowski; especially in the volume titled *The Kaczyński period. Politics in continuous turmoil* (Warszawa 2016).

Jarosław Kaczyński, delivered in Gdańsk Shipyard in 2006, may be a direct symbol of this conflict management technique. Proclaiming to his voters that his political opponents "are standing where ZOMO (Motorized unit of the National Police) did," Jarosław Kaczyński echoed Father Józef Tischner, who in the early 1990s described the deputies of the ZChN (Christian National Union) as heirs of fascism and "Soviet people"—however, Kaczyński exchanged the natural political conflict for a moral struggle over affiliation with a political community. The year 2010, the "post-Smolensk era," and then the ongoing PiS (Law and Justice party) rule since 2015, allowed the technique to be improved on both sides of the political dispute. Currently, there is virtually no political dispute in Poland (in the sense of a dispute about specific solutions for matters concerning a political community) that is not fundamentally about belonging to a political community. One arguing party casts itself as the heir of the "protoliberal" democratic opposition; it treats its opponent like the heir of the "commune," while presenting itself as embodying the "real," "patriotic" Solidarity. Thus, its opponents are considered heirs of the "post-communist system," and at the same time "foreign agents."

All this is simply a brief description of discussions in the public sphere in the broadest sense, also including clearly demagogic statements. Every discussion within political theory (including the liberal one) must take place in this exact context in Poland; and liberalism itself (as with any political doctrine) should describe a certain model of the organization of society and the state, rather than trying to be a utopian ideal or a political theory that is not translatable into practice. Jerzy Szacki claims, at the end of his book, that the liberalism in contemporary Poland (contemporary to Szacki, of course) remained a utopia. This was meant as a nod to Polish protoliberals and economic liberals. However, the history of Polish liberalism and Polish political conflicts shows that perhaps it should also be considered as relevant to the Polish political liberalism of the Third Polish Republic, which turned out to be an extension of the political, dualistic awareness of the liberal "democratic opposition." The history of Polish liberal thought also includes the achievements of people such as Marcin Król, one of the most distinguished authors and researchers of Polish political thought, who was able to publicly state that one of the conflicted political parties "personifies evil, the devil."[23] It seems that this is an example of a proper protoliberal, and of the current liberal attitude, which Szacki analysed 24 years ago—i.e. the tendency to perceive

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[23]   Marcin Król in Fakty po Faktach (news programme), TVN channel, 20 December 2017.

political conflict in terms of the established demonological categories of a Manichean struggle between good and evil. It has to be noted that liberal adversaries are often successful in this role. The same inclination (one can wonder if it was really honest) was expressed in the Gdańsk Shipyard in 2006 by Jarosław Kaczyński, who is not exactly renowned for flaunting his liberal political views. In the case of Marcin Król, this applies not only to the liberal participant in public discussion, but also to the outstanding theoretician of liberal thought, who was mentioned years ago by Szacki, alongside several other Polish authors who had accepted the "achievements of contemporary liberal political thought."[24]

What exactly is liberalism?

I believe it is worth paying attention to the question of who exactly is a liberal in Poland. If my earlier considerations are correct, anyone can be considered a political liberal, provided that their position—made explicit in declarations or at least implicit in their actions—respects the principle that the political community is built around certain basic goods, and that its main purpose is to ensure peace in a pluralistic society, rather than being a "perfect community." I think the majority of people among the Polish political audience could be classified as liberals in this way. Hence, we can call this liberalism "liberalism in the strict sense." This kind of classification forces us to consider the permissible sense of the concept of liberalism, in my opinion.

Here, however, considerations in the field of political philosophy encounter an obstacle, in the form of common beliefs. According to the beliefs present in the public discourse, the term "liberal" is used for someone who openly and not accidentally admits to the values and traditions of political liberalism, identifies with them, and uses them as arguments in current political disputes. We can call a group of such people "liberals in the colloquial sense," and the conscious liberal perspective is used as a political ideology,[25] "liberalism in the colloquial sense." The majority of the participants in the Polish public debate would be then "liberals" in the strict sense, while "liberals"

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[24] J. Szacki, *Liberalizm po komunizmie*, p. 248, annotation 74.

[25] I use a the term "ideology" slightly imprecisely: to me, it means any set of views used as a tool for mobilizing a social group around a certain political matter.

in the colloquial sense would comprise the minority. The latter are in fact a very small group of people, which is why the authors who write about Polish liberalism emphasize the group's weakness. It is interesting, however, that the publicly active "liberals in the colloquial sense" are often people who do not belong to any "strong tradition," or at least admit to having questions about the principles of such traditions.

I think this is because liberalism in the colloquial sense is characterized by more than a conviction that "community perfection" cannot be decreed at a political level. If such a belief was all they had, there could actually exist some "perfect communities," understood as communities centred around a holistic vision of a good life, i.e. communities of tradition. The only restriction imposed on them by the liberal political theory would be a ban on extending the rules of this community of traditions to the whole of society without respecting the rule of free access to the community; thus, through forced subordination to the law and institutions of the state, it would become a state of a particular, established tradition—otherwise known as a "religious state." As a result of the aforementioned belief, the liberal theory would not impose the ban on tradition communities; this would allow them to freely define complex systems of practices and views that are intended to implement a specific, complex vision of a good life within themselves, provided that access to such communities remained free. This way of understanding "liberalism" is characteristic of protoliberal European traditions, including movements for the "freedom and liberty" of citizens and states, and is also part of the liberal tradition of the 19th century; it is especially noticeable in conservative liberals, who have sought to limit the aspirations of the modern state, and to ensure the survival of pre-modern traditions of virtues and customs.

It seems, however, that this is not the typical way of thinking for modern liberals in the colloquial sense. Today, those who openly invoke the traditions of political liberalism for political purposes actually realize its far-reaching complementation, which is possible once one has recognized that no community (not just political) can be a "perfect community." The "good life" is a private matter for each individual who constructs his identity based on personal tastes and preferences. In the radical version of this approach, these preferences are of an aesthetic rather than ethical nature (in the traditional sense): they are not about the implementation of some "human nature," but are rather concerned with the construction of a subjective identity that is "good" because it corresponds to the idiosyncrasy of an individual, and not because it lets the individual

achieve his natural good state. "Human nature" is a concept that post-metaphysical liberalism must reject. In short, liberalism in the colloquial sense is an anti-traditional view. This kind of liberalism (and not the one in the strict sense) is the target of my remarks in the book On the Concept of Tradition, in which I demonstrated the impossibility of reconciling liberalism with the concept of tradition.

Of course, when we talk about liberal public discourse, it is probably difficult to assume that all of its participants have a clear understanding of its concepts. However, I think that it is a good theoretical explication of an attitude widely held by liberals in the colloquial sense, which in fact assumes this kind of an understanding. Richard Rorty is a renowned author (in the tradition of modern liberalism) who presented this interpretation of liberalism—and an extreme interpretation at that. He argues that the natural component of liberal political culture is the lack of a "final dictionary."[26] Such a dictionary would cover primitive concepts that are no longer subject to further interpretation but merely refer to certain real, metaphysically understood "goods," including "human nature," "common good," "human dignity" and "God." A liberal is always aware of the extent to which a selection of terms contained within this dictionary is prone to interpretation, and will always be able to question the obvious quality of each of those primitive concepts precisely because he does not expect the language (including political language) to be a "mirror of nature," i.e. a reference to some metaphysical states of affairs such as "being good." In this sense, the liberal—or rather, as Rorty would prefer him to be called, the "little liberal"—is always an ironist. He is aware of the adventitiousness of our language, and is able to do without the "serious" concept of metaphysical good.

This approach creates the immediate and obvious difficulty of "solidarity" in a community that is not organized around any "good," even if it were a "basic good." In order for the liberal irony to not transform into mere cruelty capable of destroying bonds and people's attachment to certain values, it is necessary to introduce a certain "obvious" rule—one that does not require any justification, even metaphysical, but sets the limits of this irony. According to Rorty, sensitivity to suffering might be considered the best candidate for this rule. Thus, suffering and a threat to existence—as the most basic and primary form of fear—define the only

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[26] See R. Rorty, *Przygodność, ironia, solidarność* (*Contingency, Irony, Solidarity*), translated by W. J. Popowski, Wydawnictwo Spacja, Warszawa 1996.

moment when the liberal is allowed and is even expected to show empathy. Rorty is convinced that this empathy does not entail any metaphysical commitment. It is difficult to say why—his assurance that human suffering is something that we should "simply" avoid is in fact a form of an earnest plea without any substantive justification. According to Rorty, "that's just the way it is." It seems that this concept represents "metaphysics" in its worst, rightly criticized style: it is basically an irrational dogma with no real justification, the presence of which (as a foundation) ensures the stability of the entire project of the liberal community.

Certainly, human suffering is something we should avoid—there is no issue here. Problems appear when we realize that in order to formulate such an obligation, we must recognize it as something evil, and treat its absence as a specific good: i.e. we should vow to uphold certain metaphysical obligations. One can avoid this verbally by saying that "no such commitments are made;" however, pointing out a certain class of situations that should be avoided requires the establishment of a judgment framework regarding the universal properties of these situations (i.e. their nature). Even if we can discuss the faulty derivation of "should" from "is," it is certainly impossible to construct an obligatory statement, without providing an existential condition regarding the situation to be eliminated or avoided as part of this obligation.

Moreover, building a set of "ethics without metaphysical commitments" only on the notion of suffering has the disadvantage of giving no explicit practical rules. Ultimately, "suffering" is a subjective condition, so it cannot be observed in any way, and thus cannot be distinguished by any means. We would also be inclined to recognize that not every suffering is accompanied by explicit behavioural symptoms. Therefore, the one who suffers has the final say in proclaiming that they are suffering. We are unable to control the validity of these declarations. As a result, we can expect that in many situations we would otherwise consider to be natural in a social context, their participants could declare that they were suffering, so it would stand to reason that avoiding these situations might be necessary. Any natural situations related to the feeling of peer pressure or any sort of resistance from a social group in particular, such as being subjected to education, rivalry or discussions with other minded people, could be problematic and serve as "sources of suffering." Therefore, although the rule of "avoiding suffering" is important, it cannot act as a rule of ethics without first defining actions which are harmful and unnatural (or unfair), and which thus require further metaphysical obligations.

All attempts at creating minimal ethics without clearly articulated metaphysical commitments, or ethics that would be "obvious" and thus excluded from traditional criticism, always end the same way: their result is a formulation of an arbitrary project revolving around a very general "basic value." Arbitration, which stems from assigning an "obvious" label to a given value, results in the confidentiality of the real rule that operates when choosing such a value. Representatives of such ethics decree certain specific, adventitious general goods as an obvious good, without any mention of specific metaphysical obligations. Because of this, they can justify contradictory and completely adventitious actions, undertaken in practical situations. Ethics without any metaphysical obligations are blind, and will be applied in this way. This is also the case with the "liberal" (in a narrow sense) canon of "basic values," which presents itself as universalistic. This universalism of arbitrary values is only a screen to cover the realization of specific goods in an implicit manner (sometimes even hidden from the liberal participants themselves).

The Polish embodiment of this pattern is the liberal "ethics of decency." Democratic opposition and victims of communist "doctrine" had, as is well-known, an aversion to all kinds of "codes." However, resisting the system required a great deal of moral mobilization, and was experienced, as Szacki notes in Liberalism after Communism, primarily as moral and cultural resistance. "Rzeczpospolita," which had existed in the underground, was therefore a "republic of decent people." "Decency" is a virtue with virtually no specific content: "decent" means literally "appropriate to the situation"—thus, the virtue of appropriateness establishes no rules for the determination of what is appropriate in a given situation. A community cannot be built only around this one virtue: it would resemble a situation in which a community were built around the concept of "prudence," or another general rule of behaviour. Meanwhile, a governing feature of the "ethics of decency" is that a decent person simply knows "how to behave." The actual justification for the tangible beliefs of members of the community of decent people is simply assumed and inarticulate, and as a result, there is no control over it. Therefore, the dispute with representatives of the "ethics of decency," or with a substantial number of post-metaphysical liberals in the narrow sense, is in fact a collision with pure will, which attempts to justify its particular actions on the basis of one very general formal principle, and recognizes it as "obvious." If it is not obvious to someone, then apparently he is not a decent person, which excludes him from the community.

Liberalism after Communism from the perspective of the 24 years of liberalism in III RP (Third Polish Republic)

The analysis of Jerzy Szacki's findings from 1994, from the perspective of the 24 years of liberalism in Poland, allows the following conclusions to be drawn.

Firstly, it seems that to some extent it has been possible to reduce the severity of the antagonisms between the state and society, at least in the minds of Polish liberals. In my opinion, this is a direct result of the liberals realizing that political conflict with supporters of the construction of a right-wing IV RP (Fourth Polish Republic) and their liberal opponents ("in the narrow sense") requires defending the Third Republic as a state, as well. Since the victory of PiS (the Law and Justice Party) in the 2015 elections, it seems that the idea of defending the rights and institutions of the Republic of Poland has actually become an important tool for mobilizing the liberal opposition.

Secondly, economic liberalism, without any signs of neo-political enthusiasm shown by some ideologists in the early 1990s, became a concept contested only by groups on the margins of public life. Of course, there is still an ongoing debate in Poland, which seems to have a very indirect impact on real political decisions, regarding how significant a portion of social sensitivity should be used to supplement this economic liberalism. However, as Jerzy Szacki noted, this is simply a discussion about proportions.[27] Admittedly, accusations directed at the "aggressive economic liberalism" of the early 1990s were sometimes formulated as a general criticism of the entire Third Polish Republic project built by political liberals. Nonetheless, economic liberalism in all of its forms remains obvious to virtually all of the participants of the public debate. Even the rhetorical "enemies of capitalism" representing the young left movement, do not want to abolish the principle of a free market. Little has changed since the time of Liberalism after Communism in this regard.

Thirdly, I think the most dangerous and greatest flaw of Polish liberalism has increased in severity still further. It is the belief in the necessity for internal unity, and the tendency to view each political dispute as concerning the affiliation with a political community. In this aspect, the narrowly defined political liberalism of the Third Polish Republic

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[27] See J. Szacki, *Liberalizm po komunizmie* (*Liberalism after Communism*), p. 261.

(along with the entire political scene) is the sole heir to the protoliberal traditions of the democratic opposition it grew from—an heir which has preserved all of its inheritance. Indeed, since there are numerous actors on the Polish political scene who strive to provide society with political guarantees regarding the protection and development of certain "basic goods," the liberals in the colloquial sense have decided to use a different strategy, instead of arguing with them whether the goods in question really are "basic goods." It is a much simpler strategy, because it does not require delving into the details of the case this particular dispute relates to. It merely involves passing judgement on whether the good indicated by the adversary is a basic and universal good (and concluding that it is not, naturally), or a specific good according to the principles of the tradition of the good life. Afterwards, the discussion can be safely moved on to the subject of the conditions of a liberal democracy, where the opponents might be criticized for trying to establish a "perfect community" or a "religious state."

The incoherence I mentioned above is a factor that decides the success or failure of this strategy. For if it is established that there is a certain obvious value that defines the universal moral order (e.g. "do not inflict suffering" or "be decent"), and that this value is not "good" in the classical sense (and thus something which cannot be decreed), then the construction of a political community project that is not based on any concept of "the good" becomes viable. In reality, as I tried to show above, the strategy requires a purely voluntary exclusion of the tangible good from the "compromised" category of goods. The inconsistency lies in the strategy's actual recognition of what this tangible good is, while at the same time claiming that it has not yet been realized. This excludes the ethical choices of liberals from the observations made by other participants of a public discussion: liberal ethical decisions simply cannot be controlled in terms of a correct or incorrect interpretation of goods. Liberals introduce themselves as advocates of universal and common values in the public sphere, while simultaneously presenting their adversaries, who seek to ensure public protection of basic goods, as the actual representatives of certain particular traditions, and the advocates of the "perfect community" who are trying to turn a liberal state of law into a "religious state." In this way, the belief in the oppressive nature of every "perfect community" (community of tradition) leads to identifying any attempt to provide political guarantees for basic goods as an act of trying to establish a political "perfect community." Since, according to a considerable number of liberals, a community cannot revolve around the concept of "the good" at all, an attempt to guarantee the show of respect to all the goods in the community

is considered a step towards building a "perfect community." The assumption that certain goods can be excluded from the general collection of goods, and that they may considered as objects of "obvious obligations," is necessary for this reasoning to work, however.

It seems that in the case of Polish liberals in the common sense, this situation cannot be explained solely by the long history of protoliberal political traditions. I think there are arguments for the supposition that modern liberal political thought is also expected to strengthen its belief that "a good life" cannot be confined within the framework of the law, which is expressed in the practices and beliefs of a community. This is a result of the entanglement of contemporary liberal tradition with post-metaphysical conceptual schemes, which are characterized by the transposition of natural purposes and nature-like life forms into a register of artefactual and legally fictional "values" and "identities." This movement turns tradition, i.e. a system of communication and practices established for the realization of substantive good, into a purely functional tool for stabilizing the psychobiological balance. Liberalism needs "tradition" as a "culture of remembrance" and a reservoir of "poor resources of meaning."[28] However, the aforementioned movement does not treat it as a natural form of life that allows people to achieve a certain level of perfection.

The link between liberalism and these anti-metaphysical assumptions is not a conceptual necessity, I believe. If liberalism is essentially a doctrine of ensuring the peaceful coexistence of a pluralistic political community made up of communities and individuals with divergent visions of a good life, it certainly does not have to be anti-metaphysical. By this definition, the "visions of a good life" cannot be metaphysical concepts linking human beliefs and practices with certain natural goods. However, important political and social tendencies in contemporary Western culture do not favour this concept of liberalism. In the liberal democracies of the West, there are many representatives of traditions who enjoy making use of these basic liberal freedoms and who recognize the rules of a pluralistic state; however, they do not call themselves "liberals," because this term is usually used to describe the "liberals in the colloquial sense," i.e. opponents of any strictly defined tradition. It seems that Poland is no different.

In this situation, the common sense of the future of liberalism in Poland does not seem very promising. It is challenging to expect

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[28] Cf. J. Habermas, *Wierzyć i wiedzieć*, translated by M. Łukasiewicz, Znak no. 568 (2002), pp. 8–21.

that a doctrine based on internal inconsistency, which is not able to justify its assumptions in a convincing way, yet at the same time tries to impose them in a patronizing manner, will be able to develop. On the other hand, political liberalism in the strict sense (i.e. the doctrine of providing a pluralistic society with the guarantee of peace), is already quite well established in Polish public awareness. Of course, there are non-marginal social groups who ask for the organization of a political community based on an "extended" package of goods which go beyond the "basic goods"—such groups include the nationalists, for example. However, one cannot simply claim that the idea of providing the society with a guarantee of protecting its basic goods, and allowing the intra-social traditions to keep the freedom to realize their visions of a good life, is not widely recognized. Indeed, it is spread widely enough for it to be tacitly accepted as obvious. The political agenda of liberals in the strict sense, and the mainly verbal fundamental conflict of their political nature, make it difficult to understand the reasoning for such a broadly accepted consensus regarding the organization of a political community, which symbolizes the freedom of the tradition of a good life built on the basis of guaranteed basic goods. Of course, Polish society is still deeply divided. However, these divisions are in fact present within the framework of a functioning political community. The real, essential differences relate to the understanding of various goods, but not to the rules of organizing the political community itself. Once we have recognized this truth, we might be closer to finding real solutions to this dispute. As long as it is defined incorrectly—in ethical terms, as a dispute between "good" and "evil," "decent" and "indecent" people ("real Poles" and "traitors")—there will be no way to solve it. This is a lesson on necessity that political theory gives us, regardless of whether we will ever find a solution to these disputes regarding the understanding and the scope of basic goods.

Translated by: Piotr Sarna

Paweł Grad

Liberalism and the Conflict of Traditions

Abstract

The paper contains a critique of Jerzy Szacki's stance presented in his *Liberalism after Communism*. The critique is a starting point for a theory of the conflict of traditions in liberal democracies, which is presented here and improved. The original version was presented in the author's book *On the Conflict of Traditions*. The leading thesis of the latter reads: the one and the only possible liberal political doctrine (which is that of liberalism strictly speaking) implies a metaphysically burdened notion of good; otherwise it could not be self-consistent. Accepting the notion subsequently enables a justification of the possible conflict of traditions, without breaching the principles of the liberal public sphere. The mainstream modern liberal political theory (liberalism in the common sense of the word) does not respect the notion, which threatens the systemic self-consistency; this also applies to the Polish discourse on liberalism. In the first two parts of the paper, Szacki's position is presented and criticized. In the third part, the main thesis is put forward. The thesis is, in turn, illustrated by the example of the history of liberalism in the Third Polish Republic. In the fifth part, the notions of liberalism *sensu stricte*, and that of liberalism understood commonly, are presented. Finally, conclusions are drawn from Szacki's point of view regarding the experience of 24 years of liberalism in Poland.

Keywords: Jerzy Szacki, liberalism, tradition, the Third Polish Republic.