STUDIA UBB. EUROPAEA, LXII, 3, 2017, 151-176

RADICALISM AND MODERNITY

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DOI: 10.24193/subbeuropaea.2017.3.07
Published Online: 2017-09-30
Published Print: 2017-09-30

Abstract
In contemporary debates on social radicalism there is a predominant belief that it carries with it serious threats to the public sphere, similar to all manifestations of extremism and other attitudes that challenge and question the liberal basis of the social order. The persistent and almost obsessive identification of radicalism with populism and religious fundamentalism, and in general with danger to the social order, seems to confirm this tendency. Meanwhile, the alternative subject literature indicates how much this way of thinking is ideologized and aligned with conservatism in thought, casting a blind eye to the complex motives of the radical subject. We refer here to various applications of radicalism as a philosophical, psychological and social predicament, which prompts the revision of abusive and simplified interpretations. We also assume that radicalism, as properly understood, can be interpreted as a kind of peculiar fever emerging out of the piling up of possibilities brought about by modernity. Radicalism is a disquieting state of mind, which appears not so strongly in a risk society as in a society of infinite opportunities[1].
Keywords: radicalism, social movements, democracy, modernity

Introduction

What is radicalism? The difficulty in explaining its essence arises from the dialectical relationships that combine the etymology of the term with the historical and cultural contexts in which radicalism appears. Other

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[1] This article is largely based on my book entitled *Cień Radykalizmu; pojęcie radykalizmu w świetle teorii ruchów społecznych*, published by ASPRA, Centrum Europejskie Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, Warszawa 2016.

factors, such as gender, language, ideology, or nationality[2], as well as a certain tendency to associate radicalism with a magnitude of images and epithets (e.g., fundamentalism, extremism, terrorism, revolution, utopianism, perversion, dogmatism, reaction, etc.), may also complicate the meaning of the term. These numerous contexts with which radicalism is associated preclude any attempts to rationally explain this notion and the phenomena, which thus remains either illegible or incomplete. Although the literature on the subject presented below is rarely successful in grasping the more universal and substantive features of radicalism, it at least makes it possible to see clearly how often this term is abused.

We distinguish here three mainstream currents of thinking about radicalism. These streams are intertwined and take into account only the most essential and characteristic features of radicalism. *Firstly*, we distinguish the trend whereby radicalism evokes itself as an intellectual and philosophical attitude; as an ideological or spiritual form of being in the world. *Secondly*, we can see a trend in which radicalism lies above all in the psychological qualities and make-up of a person, both those belonging to his or her individually constituted personality and those born in response to external factors. *Finally*, we can point to a third wave of socio-political reflection, which interprets radicalism as an endless need to fight for another world, a difficult (pointed or destructive) dispute over the public sphere and the principles of politics, preserving the spaces of coexistence. Radicalism is here a phenomenon that has its own social logic. This review takes into account only those titles where the notion of radicalism appears *expressis verbis* and remains the chief object of examination, and not, as is often the case, only as an adjective describing other phenomena, e.g. "radical modernity", the "radical right" or "radical sociology". We also do not examine here the specificity of radicalism resulting from the national, ethnic or cultural contexts, as that is a completely separate phenomenon and obviously deserving of a separate study.

[2] Paul McLaughlin, *Radicalism. A Philosophical Study*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012, p. 8.

Spiritual radicalism

The most distinctive feature of the first category of interpretations devoted to radicalism is their passionate attachment to the very foundations of human life, to the primordial desires of man. The exciting promise of their fulfilment is connected with the hope for a great discovery of the roots [*radix*] of human life. This metaphor – so deeply ingrained in European culture – indicates something extremely precious, very close to and perhaps even indistinguishable from nature, but in the end invisible. Radicalism in this sense sets out an uneasy path to the deepest sources of humanity. How much joy Friedrich Nietzsche must have had when his daring intellectual project – especially his epistemological critique, wherein democracy, liberalism and egalitarianism were identified with human fall and cultural decadence – was described as the efflorescence of "aristocratic radicalism"[3].

We mention the German thinker here not in order to approve the reviews of his work, but to point out that many who followed his path of extreme scepticism, "cognitive revolt" against and even negation of the commonly used meanings and rules of ethics and politics, can hardly be called radicals in the conventional sense of the word. Their radicalism in thinking and contemplating the world was essentially leading to what Gaston Bachelard described as an "epistemological rupture" [fr. *rupture épistémologique*] which, according to Ramziga Keucheyan, is the essence of radical thinking, intellectual or philosophical radicalism in general[4]. The essence of such radicalism is, first of all, the dissension of what *is*, and, secondly, the description of reality in terms totally different from those used in common language, what serves to attain a more thorough understanding. Walter Benjamin defines these radical categories of thinking as "extreme types" [niem. *extreme typen*], in opposition to the "ideal types". The former above all make the roots of human life more accessible.

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[3] Bruce Detwiler, *Nietzsche and the Politics of Aristocratic Radicalism*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1990, p. 189.

[4] Razmig Keucheyan, "Qu'est-ce qu'une pensée radical? Aspects du radicalism épistémique" 2010 [http://www.journaldumauss.net/?Qu-est-ce-qu-une-pensee-radicale], accessed July 2017.

According to Helmuth Plessner, who introduced some important remarks on radicalism in his book *The limits of community,* this view may lead to a Manichaean image of reality[5]. In general, Plessner considers the axiological severity of the radical *état d'esprit* as dangerous for man and social life. The uniqueness of his approach lies in his broad understanding of the sources and consequences of radicalism, understood simultaneously as anthropological and religious, intellectual and emotional, national and socio-political phenomena. The German thinker assumes that radicalism leads to a constant tearing down, resulting from the lack of acceptance of the state of affairs, filled with violence and superficiality, as well as from the need to affirm the sublime "invisible community". Radicalism is powered by great and complete views, or as Plessner writes: "The thesis of radicalism is the ruthlessness, its perspective - is infinity, its pathos – is enthusiasm, its temperament – the ardour"[6]. Radicalism is a form of "spiritual poisoning" marked by a sense of deprivation, so very significant for, in particular, weak people. Plessner's categories of "blood radicalism" (related to *Gemeinschaft des Blute*) and "matter radicalism" (respectively related to *Gemeinschaft der Sache*), which are essentially the echo and commentary of the famous distinction between community and association articulated by Ferdinand Tönnies, constitute, in our view, an original and rare attempt to interpret radicalism not only as a phenomenon which refers to reformist (liberal and leftist) attitudes, but also to consider it as a complex mood that might haunt anyone[7].

An outstanding American social activist and spiritual leader of counter-cultural movements, Saul Alinsky, at no point in his somewhat journalistic book *Reveille for Radicals* uses the term "radicalism"[8]. Instead, he consistently and consequently uses the term "radical", so as to emphasize the subjective stance of the radical towards the world. Alinsky's portrait of a radical is not only an archetypical example of a radical personality understood as a reformer and humanist, but also an "ideal type" of a

[5] Helmuth Plessner, *The Limits of Community: A Critique of Social Radicalism*, Amherst, NY: Humanity Books 1999.

[6] *Ibidem*, p. 5.

[7] Cf.: Mikołaj Rakusa-Suszczewski, "Radykalizm, podmiotowość i sfera publiczna w refleksji Helmutha Plessnera", in *Folia Sociologica*, nr 47, 2013, pp. 17-37.

[8] Saul D. Alinsky, *Reveille for Radicals*, Chicago: Chicago University Press 1946. Cf.: Saul Alinsky, *Rules for Radicals*. New York: Random House, Inc., 1971.

radical temper, with its intellectual and philosophical inclinations, which – as he assumes – actually do not exist in pure form[9]. This radicalism, in the same way as in Plessner's work, expresses a Manichean rupture, which results from constant questioning of the *modus vivendi*, and leads to a belief that anticipating a better world is possible. According to Alinsky a radical believes fiercely in what he or she says and puts the value of the common good above his/her own interests. Its distinctive feature is faith in man, respect for individuals, and a belief in a healthier world where people can materialize their inexhaustible potential. Alinsky defends the humans' souls and fights with the evils of this world: wars, fear, misery, and dehumanizing and thoughtless rationalization. He does not succumb to appearances and always looks for the paramount things – the very essence of existing problems. This is a way for a radical to express his/her sincerity and in particular "youth" - courage, simplicity and naivety. As Alinsky argues, a radical fights not only for political and economic freedom, but also for social freedom. This is why (s)he strives for decent living conditions and human rights, equal rights of minorities, universal education, and for the special value of work, social planning, and self-organization. A radical struggles with the privileges of the few, with the caste system and hypocrisy, so essential – as Alinsky argues – for the liberals. Saul Alinsky delivers an example of radicalism understood as a leftist attitude rooted in the universalist view of human affairs, still strong in the present times (especially in Anglo-Saxon cultures).

Egon Bittner, in his attempt to conceptualize radicalism, sees in it above all reflective and prophetic attitudes[10]. Although the ideal type of this social behaviour expresses a reluctance toward routines and the common-sense imagination, as well as a need for their critical revision and even rejection, radicalism incarnates a stance based on reflection close to scientific critique. By its nature, it is an attitude typical of the few who are able to bear the weight of a dispute over history, or what Bittner calls "radical historiography", and who can coherently argue for the creation of a new world. Because radicalism contains uncompromising prophecies, in the end it becomes scientific and quasi-religious at the same time. It is in its

[9] *Ibidem*, p. 30.

[10] Egon Bittner, "Radicalism and the Organization of Radical Movements", in *American Sociological Review*, no. 6, vol. 28, 1963, p. 932.

courageous visions that radicalism reveals the root(s) of all things. Yet this leads to a paradox: the inevitable confrontation with the rules of the public sphere forces radicalism into a schematic rigor based on a single and independent principle – it reinforces the discipline and extremist elements necessary to preserve the purity of one's own identity. Radicalism appears here again as ideological zealotry, but in practice it remains fragile, because – as Bittner argues – preserving such cohesion is impossible in the long run[11]. We already have this knowledge from ancient tragedies. In his thesis Bittner reiterated this in another text from 1968, stressing that radicalism has its own value-rational functionality and it cannot be reduced to emotional states, as for example Adorno assumes[12]. Radical ideology appears on the margins of social life, and therefore it is linked to radical social movements[13]. Radicalism often triggers mechanisms similar to those that occur in sects (susceptibility to the influence of charismatic leaders, a strong sense of differentness, self-control, purity of belief, fidelity to heroic ideals, etc.).

In 2008 Tormey, in the latest edition of the Encyclopedia of Macmillan, states that radicalism can only be understood in a particular cultural and historical context[14]. What seems to be radical in one place and time is simply not in another. It is therefore impossible to explain this attitude in terms of a specific ideology or the essence of things. It is basically devoid of essence. At the same time, the author introduces an interesting distinction between modern and postmodern radicalism, which, in spite of everything, suggests that a kind of reflective and moral attitude towards the world characterizes the radical. While modern radicalism is characterized by certainty and faith in a better world, postmodern radicalism is sinking into scepticism. The abandonment or loss of this certainty deprives contemporary radicalism of its social power to transform the world – it is rather a source of anxiety. This interpretation may lead to

[11] *Ibidem*, p. 934.

[12] Egon Bittner, "Radicalism", in D. E. Stills (ed.), *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*, New York: Macmillan, 1968, p. 294.

[13] *Ibidem*, p. 295.

[14] Simon Tormey, "Radicalism", in W.A. Darity Jr. (ed.), *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*. vol. 7, Farmington Hills: Macmillan Reference, 2008, pp. 48-51.

the conclusion that fragility and lack of orthodoxy are indeed constitutive; the certainty of the roots is replaced by a melancholy and longings.

In concluding this section it is worth mentioning Paul McLaughlin's monograph: *Radicalism; A Philosophical Study*, where radicalism is treated as a predominant category of political and philosophical thought, analysed through its semantic meanings – its connotations, etymology, and history[15]. The interpretation of its various political forms leads him to some ahistorical conclusions, wherein radicalism reveals its humanistic essence and attachment to the idea of progress.

Psychological Radicalism

The second mainstream that still has repercussions for the interpretations of radicalism and related phenomena (such as extremism and terrorism) refers to psychological categories. The power of this paradigmatic optic is based on the conviction that human action is rooted in the dark layers of the psyche, as equally inaccessible and invisible as the human roots. Psychology, so fundamentally linked to modern philosophical reflection, stigmatized the thinking concerning radicalism at the beginning of the twentieth century. This approach consisted of revealing radicalism as a process – as a *radicalization*. In 1906, James E. Shea introduced one of the first psychological conceptions of radicalism as a deep and complex attitude[16]. He distinguished between 'old' and 'new' radicalism, anticipating the interpretation of the above-mentioned Simon Tormey. Principality and unambiguity were incarnations of old radicalism, while he identified the new with feverish visions of progress, devoid of any idealism and style. This description of the new radicalism must have been testimony of a profoundly conservative reluctance toward a creeping world, marked by haste, credulity, superficiality, and an almost anarchic disregard for any principles. James Shea stated that the new radicalism had a childish nature, and introduced a common view that this state of mind was infantile and based on irrational sources.

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[15] Paul McLaughlin, *op. cit.*

[16] James E. Shea, "Radicalism and Reform", in *Proceedings of the American Political Science Association*, vol. 3, 1906, pp. 158-168.

Albert Wolfe therefore found that radicalism has its psychological motives and is a complex reaction to particular incentives[17]. Man is stimulated by anxiety, discomfort, and helplessness about the surrounding reality, but what ultimately determines radicalism is the adaptation related to *sublimation* and *empowerment* – as Wolfe explains in his psychoanalytic language. *Repression* does not allow the emergence of radicalism. Customs and temperament influence the directions of sublimation. In its most ephemeral form, radicalism can also take a "symbolic" form. But radicalism, as a response to incentives and obstacles, is capable of generating a reformatory social movement only through empowerment[18]. It is for this reason that radicalism is a feature of the few, who, both in addition to and similar to intellectuals, can be stimulated by other incentives such as curiosity, inquisitiveness, ingenuity, ambition, the need for social innovation, competition, or self-expression. In other words, radicalism flows from both a psychological anxiety as well as from a psychologically-conditioned need to reconstruct the world.

The notion of radicalism introduced by Thomas William Root is socially authorized and context-dependent. It usually refers to those who challenge the traditional ideas of society and destroy the comfort of a conventional life[19]. It is in a collision with the public sphere, which causes emotional disturbances in a radical, including disorder and disease. Root argues, however, that a radical is not a neurasthenic, but through his/her simultaneous superiority and inferiority complexes often turns into an aggressive and assertive egoist. Root argued that such characteristics are usually attributed to the so-called intelligentsia, as well as to Jewish and proletarian intellectuals. In its essence, radicalism is the product of a tension between the social majority and the *few*, either left- or right-wing. Solomon Diamond expanded this interdependence between the public sphere and radicalism, and argued that radicalism was a form of a tension-reducing defence against the common introversion of the mass societies[20].

[17]Albert Benedict Wolfe, "The Motivation of Radicalism", in *Psychological Review*, vol. XXVIII (4), 1921, pp. 279-300.

[18] *Ibidem*, p. 295.

[19] Thomas Root William, "The Psychology of Radicalism", in *The Journal of Abnormal Psychology and Social Psychology*, vol. 19(4), 1925, pp. 341-356.

[20] Salomon Diamond, *A Study of the Influence of Political Radicalism on Personality Development*. *Archives of Psychology*, New York: Columbia University, 1936.

Yet according to Root the negative opinion of radicalism was unjust. It is rather a creative, innovative and noble predilection.

In his analysis, Elary Francis Reed perceived radicalism primarily as irrational and unreflective passions of the "popular mind"[21]. Reed locates their sources in blocked emotions, defence mechanisms and, within the needs for compensation and self-purification, in the strong identification with the disadvantaged as well as in the moral motives which turn radicalism into a rational action.

The quoted texts from the beginning of the century show not only the growing interest in psychological interpretations aimed at explaining the individual and social actions of people, but also a newly-established belief that the drives of the social processes are irrational. These psychological inquiries largely framed the interpretation of radicalism and related phenomena as something that escapes political pragmatism, is incompatible with reason, and therefore dangerous, vicious, and/or leading to evil. This is the way radicalism was described by Horace Kallen[22]. Although it originally provided impetus for institutional change and its message was democratic, humanitarian, and pacifist, the then-contemporary radicalization was based on complicated and destructive complexes: hatred and detriment. Indeed, radicalism began to manifest itself more in behaviour than in reflection. This kind of fervour and resentment equally characterized diverse ideologies, and the word "radical" became the "ugly name" of a serious imbalance.

The studies on authoritarianism, which is still very often identified with radicalism, deliver significant examples of such a psychological approach. The book by Theodor Adorno and his associates on *Authoritarian Personality* is probably the best such example[23]. Among the works highlighting the psychological dimensions of radicalism, Eugene H.

[21] Francis E. Reed, "Psychic mechanisms and social radicalism", in *The Journal of Social Forces*, vol. 2(1), 1923, cf.: Francis E. Reed, *Treatment of Social Radicalism: Its Psychological and Social Aspects*, Madison: University of Wisconsin, 1922.

[22] Horace M. Kallen, "Radicalism", in *Encylopedia of the Social Sciences*, New York: The Macmillan Company, 1934, pp. 51-54.

[23] Theodor W. Adorno, Else Frenkel-Brunswik, Daniel Levinson, Nevitt Sanford, *The Authoritarian Personality*, New York: Harper and Row, 1950.

Methvin's *The Rise of Radicalism* deserves attention[24]. The American writer attributes insanity, hatred, conspiratorial thinking and tyrannical inclinations to all forms of political radicalism. In his gallery of radical personalities we can find Robespierre, Babeuf, Chernyshevsky, Marx, Lenin, Hitler, Mussolini, etc. Violence is intertwined here with cataclysm, and their sources are educational difficulties and conflicts with the father, expressed in the language of psychoanalysis. Methvin's book was one of the many commentaries on the rapidly-changing societies in the 1960s.

We should mention here another outstanding research work from this period, i.e. the work of Rothman and Lichter who described, in *The Roots of Radicalism*, the phenomenon of the American and European (especially German) student movements and the new left movements[25]. Their work was the result of sociological analysis and complementary studies rooted in the traditions of psychoanalysis, ego psychology, and in the object relationship theory. Their study was focused on cultural, social and political changes (related to the development of the civil rights movement and the war in Vietnam) that brought about an unprecedented ideological crisis in America. The publication emphasized the key role of the Jewish (ethnic and religious) minority, with its "marginal" position in the social structure and its reluctance toward oppressive establishments. They argue that these changes created a special generational mood for the expression of hidden fantasies, usually controlled and under repression in a multidimensional system of bourgeois education forming the superego. They claim, in fact, that the sources of radicalism are related to the dissemination of the democratic culture of narcissistic individualism, which rejects traditional principles in favour of the unfettered development of the ego. The main consequence of this process, associated with radicalization, was the decreasing capacity of man to sublimate erotic impulses and aggression, and thus the gradual destruction of the whole system of meanings that have created culture. This gradual radicalization, which Richter and Rothman associated with the new left movement, meant, above all, an ever greater sense of being torn between the need for power and

[24] Eugene H. Methvin, *The Rise of Radicalism : The Social Psychology of Messianic Extremism*, Arlington: Arlington House Productions, 1973.

[25] Stanley Rothman, Robert S. Lichter, *Roots of Radicalism: Jews, Christians, and the Left*, New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1996.

gratification and the fear of losing control; between the quest for autonomy and the dream of perishing in a new meaningful order (this was especially true of radicals of non-Jewish origin). In this context, the notion of "inverse authoritarianism" seems to play an important role and turns this work into an overt polemic with Adorno.

Socio-political radicalism

In the third wave, radicalism is a synonym for a reformist political stance; hence its primary kinship with enlightenment. The English Whigs at the turn of the 18th and 19th centuries made the most important intellectual contribution to the popularization of radicalism, understood as a liberal and democratic attitude. Although they were strongly influenced by the French Jacobins, their radical social reform project excluded any violence. Among them, the most recognized innovator of the new political system was Jeremy Bentham, the author of the political pamphlet *Radicalism not Dangerous*, prepared in 1819 and published in 1843[26]. In it the philosopher refers to critical and widespread views on radicalism as the alleged source of all evil, absurd and nocuous ideas, and destructive machinations that the British public – gripped by fearsome images of the bloody revolution in France – was willing to attribute to the English radicals. Meanwhile, he believed that radicalism was the only way to overcome the real pathologies and social injustices, thus it potentially incarnated the necessary political and moral changes. In his political project, radical transformations were linked in particular to the fundamental reform of the electoral system, consisting of annual, equal, universal, and secret elections. Some of Bentham's ideas were known to the public from his earlier publications (such as the *Plan of Parliamentary Reform*), referring to the writings of John Cartwright (which were scrupulously described by Élie Halévy[27]. The most important thing for us, however, is that Bentham identified radicalism with peaceful reform.

In his *Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right* from 1844 [*Zur Kritik der Hegelschen Rechtsphilosophie*], Karl Marx opposed the reformist and liberal

[26] Jeremy Bentham, "Radicalism Not Dangerous", in Browring, J. (ed.), *Works of Jeremy Bentham,* Edinburgh: W. Tait; London: Simpkin, Marshall, 1843, pp. 599-622.

[27] Elie Halévy, *La formation du radicalisme philosophique. L'évolution de la doctrine utilitaire de 1789 à 1815*, Paris: PUF, 1995.

interpretation of radicalism, arguing for a new, more categorical form of social criticism, with its ultimate and convenient instrument: revolution[28]. Each of these thinkers – Bentham and Marx – set forth distinct and different strategies for being radical: peaceful and militant – enlightened and romantic. Radicalism, understood as an insight into the roots of things, that is – according to Marx – "reaching" the man himself, indicates not only the need for an uncompromising struggle against every cause of his subjugation or humiliation. Marx injects into radicalism an ideal of non-mediation, which has become so characteristic of at least some left-wing projects of direct democracy, where this "reaching" turns into the empowerment of social actors at all costs, or even – symbolically – at the price of abolishing the sacred institution of the family. It is no accident that the principal figure of the new left – Herbert Marcuse, in his book *Eros and Civilization* saw the condition of "radical subjectivity" in sexual liberation[29], and Agnés Heller, the prominent neo-Marxist thinker called, in her project "radical ethics", for not only the individual concern for one's neighbour (soliciting for freedom, happiness and perfection), but also for the ultimate abolition of all asymmetries in the public sphere resulting from the dogmas of obedience and subordination[30]. In Marx's view, radicalism is a project of the defetishization of human life, that is, of liberating man of all unnecessary objects interfering with his contact with others and himself.

According to McCormack, an honest reflection on radicalism in the post-war period had completely disappeared[31]. The title of her paper (*The Motivation of Radicals*) might seem to again point to psychological interpretations, but in fact it was a call for a more sociological approach that would go beyond the unjust and naive tendency to see only personal disorders and extremist leanings in radicalism; i.e. an appeal to abandon Freud for Marx. According to McCormack, there were no manifest and convincing characteristics of radicalism that could be derived from the psychological interpretations of Gordon Allport, Henry T. Moore, John

[28] Karl Marx, *Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right*, Cambridge, New York, Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1970.

[29] Herbert Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization: A Philosophical Inquiry into Freud*, Boston: Beacon Press, 1966.

[30] Agnés Heller, *A Radical Philosophy*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1984.

[31] Thelma H. McCormack, "The Motivation of Radicals", in *American Journal of Sociology*, no. 56, 1950, pp. 17-24.

Flügel, Joel Rinald and Harold Laswell[32]. She argued, referring to Krout's and Stagner's as well as to Newcomb's alternative analysis that those who question the accepted principles act according to their place in the social structure, in relation to the objective historical situation, and also because of positive identification with particular values. Therefore it is necessary to analyse the problem of radicalism not in isolation, but in relation to political opportunities and the dynamics of social movements.

In 1955 Seymour Lipset for the first time used the concept of radicalism to refer to right-wing political extremism[33]. The term "right-wing radicalism" has fallen on fertile ground in America, traditionally sceptical of feverish reformist ambitions. As Lipset pointed out, radicalism in age of McCarthy was expressed not only in the pursuit of far-reaching institutional change, but also in the desire to exclude those who threatened the values and interests of "real Americans". Lipset attributed the emergence of such right-wing radicalism to so-called *status politics*, distinguishing it from *class politics*. While the latter refers to economic interests and develops in times of economic instability into a need for reform, 'status politics' develops in times of prosperity, when frustration can arise out of a sense of one's insufficiently strong economic or social position. According to Lipset, this leads to resentment, and consequently to radicalism.

Among the works devoted to the issue of radicalism, two collections are worthy of attention. Seweryn Bialer, together with Sophie Sluzar, edited one of the most interesting and extensive collections of texts on this topic, entitled *Radicalism in the Contemporary Age*[34]. Based on numerous articles by prominent intellectuals (Nisbet, Kołakowski, Raskin, Brzezinski) a complex image of radicalism emerges, one which goes far beyond a simple association of radicalism with left-wing attitudes. Its voluminous sources (Vol. I), visions of the future (Vol. II), as well as the strategies and influence that radicalism exerts on both the spiritual condition of modern man and

[32] *Ibidem*, pp. 18-19.

[33] Seymour Lipset, "The Sources of the Radical Right", in *The Radical Right, The New American Right Expanded and Updated*, Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company. Inc., 1963, pp. 259-377.

[34] Seweryn Bialer, Sophia Sluzar (eds.), *Radicalism in the Contemporary Age*, Boulder, Col.: Westview Press, 1977.

the political and social situation (Vol. III) were widely discussed. Equally ambitious, and quite similar in terms of its form, was the publication: *What is Radical Politics Today*, edited in 2009 by Jonathan Pugh[35]. This book is a collection of various responses to the question of what constitutes radical politics. Prominent intellectuals (e.g. Bauman, Furedi, Soy and Mouffe) present different visions of modern radical politics (Part I), new forms of radical politics (Part II), its relation to diversities and differences (Part III), as well the visions of the State (Part IV) resulting from a radical stance, here essentially understood as a leftist attitude.

The notion of radicalism may be "contaminated" for various reasons, however the lack of its clarity encourages us to take into account all these heterogeneous contexts and consider their importance. Social science has done a great deal in this regard, pointing to many relationships that combine radicalism with social structure and class representation, political circumstances, culture, nationality, religion, and even gender. These issues cannot be entirely ignored, as we know from Helmuth Plessner. Here we draw attention only to titles in English, with full and humbling awareness that the literature of the subject in other languages may be equally rich. At least since the early 1960s there has been an ongoing and extensive debate about whether radicalism is a feature of excluded, discriminated, and marginal groups, or whether it is more of a middle class phenomenon. These are more reflections on the determinants of radicalism than an analysis of the very concept, but they provoke us to ask important questions. Christopher Lasch, in his 1965 work *The New Radicalism in America 1889-1963*, argues that radicalism is the work of intellectuals who revolted against the middle class that gave birth to them[36]. Similarly Frank Parkin, in his analysis of the 1968 British anti-nuclear movement, *Middle Class Radicalism*[37], and Robert Johnston in his book, *The Radical Middle Class* focus their attention on middle class sources of radicalism[38]. Among the publications highlighting the structure of

[35] Jonathan Pugh (ed.), *What is Radical Politics Today*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009.
[36] Christopher Lasch, *The New Radicalism in America 1889-1963: The Intellectual as a Social Type*, University of Michigan: Vintage, 1967.
[37] Frank Parkin, *Middle Class Radicalism: The Social Bases of the British Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1968.
[38] Robert D. Johnstone, *The Radical Middle Class: Populist Democracy and the Question of Capitalism in Progressive Era Portland, Oregon*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003.

political circumstances, including the cultural determinants of radicalism, worth mentioning is the book by Colin J. Beck entitled *Radicals, Revolutionaries, and Terrorists*, wherein the author not only describes the numerous connections between the phenomena listed in the title, the ways of organizing radical movements, and the dynamics of their development, but also presents interesting reflections on the very notion of radicalism[39]. Among the works that exemplify the link between radicalism and religion, alongside the aforementioned books by Lichter and Rothman, worthy of mention is the work by Christiane Timmerman et. al., *Faith-based Radicalism*[40]. The relationship between race and radicalism is taken into consideration by, among others, Abram Lincoln Harris in the book *Race, Radicalism, and Reform*[41]. An interesting issue is related to the "gender" of radicalism, which, if identified with violence, is one of the central themes of feminist critique, but when understood more sensitively, it grows to an essential feature of this critique, hence the term "radical feminism". In all these approaches, radicalism is embedded in various social contexts that multiply its meaning.

At the end of this brief review of the socio-political narratives of radicalism, we should also refer the theories of social movements, which have continuously reflected on this subject. In assessing their significance and usefulness, we will confine ourselves to the most important representatives of three main currents that have established the main directions in the interpretation of social movements and radicalism. The first of them, which emerged at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries and lasted until the 1960s, linked the concept of radicalism with the dysfunctions of mass society, the irrational violence of crowds, and the unpredictability of marginalized groups. A wide range of works should be included here, from the *Psychology of the Crowd* (1895) by Gustav Le Bon, through to the books of collective behaviour theorists, such as *The True Believer* (1951) by Eric Hoffer, *The Politics of Mass Society* (1959) by William

[39] Colin J. Beck, *Radicals, Revolutionaries, and Terrorists*, Cambridge: John Wiley & Sons, 2015.

[40] Christiane Timmerman, Dirk Hutsebaut, Sara Mels, Walter Nonneman (eds.), *Faith-based Radicalism: Christianity, Islam, and Judaism between Constructive Activism and Destructive Fanaticism*, Brussels: Peter Lang, 2007.

[41] Abram L. Harris, *Race, Radicalism, and Reform: Selected Papers of Abram L. Harris*, New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction Publishers, 1989.

Kornhauser, and the *Theory of Collective Behavior (1963)* by Neil Smelser, as well as the texts of relative deprivation theorists, such as Ted Gurr, the author of *Why Men Rebel* (1962)[42].

In the 1970s an alternative concept of social movements emerged, according to which radicalism was not based on psychological dysfunctions, but was the result of rational actions related to fundamental social, cultural and economic changes. Radicalism was interpreted as a manifestation of the rational mobilization of social resources, i.e., a justified and organized response to objective dysfunctions in social structures. Mayer Zald and John McCarthy, the authors of the famous article *Resource Mobilization and Social Movements: A Partial Theory* (1977), played a great role in shaping this paradigm. Charles Tilly's book *From Mobilization to Revolution* (1978) contributed to the development of the theory of political circumstances, which highlighted the importance of the context of social unrest, including the environment, for radicalism[43].

Finally, in the 1980s and 1990s the cultural paradigm of social movement studies opened up new perspectives in the thinking about radicalism. The strategic importance of language and semantic structures has been exposed by proponents of frame alignment theories, such as William Gamson and David Snow, co-authors of the widely discussed publication, *Frame Alignment Processes, Micromobilization and Movement Participation* (1986). European scholars have established the notion of "new social movements", highlighting issues of identity struggle in the debate about radicalism. Alain Touraine, Alberto Melucci and Manuel Castells – the author of *The Power of Identity* (1997) – played a key role here. The cultural theories, illustrated for example by the work *The Passionate Politics* (2001) of Jasper, Goodwin and Polletta, address subjective needs, moral dilemmas, and in particular the emotions of social movement activists, and

[42] Cf.: Gustav Le Bon, *Psychology of the Crowd,* Southampton: Sparkling Books Ltd, 2009; Eric Hoffer, The True Believer: Thoughts on the Nature of Mass Movements, *New York: Harper Perennial Modern Classics, 2002 ;* William Kornhauser, *The Politics of Mass Society*, New York: The Free Press, 1959; Neil Smelser, *Theory of Collective Behavior*, New York: The Free Press, 1963. Gurr Ted Robert, *Why Men Rebel*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970.

[43] John D. McCarthy, Mayer N. Zald, „Resource mobilization and Social Movement", in *American Journal of Sociology,* no. 82, 1977, pp. 1112-1141; Charles Tilly, *From Mobilization to Revolution*, New York: Random House, 1978.

thus demonstrate innumerable imponderables connected with radicalism[44]. It was thanks to such a diversity of interpretations that Craig Calhoun could publish his book, *The Roots of Radicalism*, wherein he considers radicalism as a necessary intellectual and social power performing its role since at least from the beginning of the nineteenth century[45].

Conventional Radicalism *versus* Substantive Radicalism

The works mentioned here should be a necessary reference in any research about radicalism, which is conventionally interpreted as purely an intensification of extremes. The definitional problems surrounding this unclear and rich concept appear over and over again. It is a challenge which rarely yields satisfactory results. Perhaps the best evidence of the confusion that arises around the phenomenon of radicalism is the fact that it can now describe both the terrifying actions of Islamic extremists and the peaceful protests of the progressive left. It is difficult not to notice that the social movements behind these actions vary in almost every way. What really connects them is not the exaggeration and recourse to violence, but the special moods and predilections of the subjects of radicalism, which, as modernity progresses, are becoming increasingly more evident.

We find it inspiring that an anticipation of such a complex nature of radical attitudes can be found in the work of the aforementioned German thinker Helmuth Plessner. Although the sociologist presents radicalism as a threat to mankind and the public sphere, there is a delicate depth in this interpretation, which does not permit it to be thought of in terms of ordinary and vulgar extremism, or as an inclination to exaggerated actions and unwarranted violence. I presented a detailed criticism of this interpretation in my book: *Cień radykalizmu*; thus here I will present here only some basic conclusions, which not only yield insights into the complex predilections of the radical subject, but also make it possible to understand

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[44] *Cf.*: David A. Snow, Burke E. Rocheford, Steven K. Worden, Rober D. Benford, "Frame Alignment Processes, Micromobilization and Movement Participation", in *American Sociological Review,* no. 51(4), 1986, pp. 546–581 ; Jeff Goodwin, James M. Jasper, Francesca Polletta, *Passionate Politics: Emotions and Social Movements*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001.

[45] *Cf.*: Craig Calhoun, *The Roots of Radicalism: Tradition, the Public Sphere and Early Nineteenth Century Social Movements*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2012.

why they are coming to life in the age of late modernity, or – as Anthony Giddens puts it – in times of the radicalisation of modernity[46]. The substantive radicalism that I present here is at the same time a synthesis of the alternative and more "benevolent" interpretations that I referred to in the first part of this article.

First, radicalism can be a matter of description and evaluation only in the context of a particular understanding of the subject and public sphere. This also implies the need for an interdisciplinary approach, also proven by Plessner himself. It is not just about the more or less liberal or conservative images of the world that constantly alter the boundaries of radicalism, but about more detailed philosophical anthropology, psychological premises, social ontology or simply about the philosophy of life. The critique of social radicalism presented by the German thinker would look entirely different if - in place of the premise of the "decentred position of the subject", i.e. Plessner's belief about subject's ontological fragility and his thesis that the public sphere should hence be a space of hygiene where people can feel secure – we put an active subject looking for opportunities to compete (ἀγών), as is presented for instance in the work of Hannah Arendt.

Secondly, radicalism is characterized by a simultaneous sense of deficit (i.e. insufficiency), aroused hopes, and grief. Plessner reveals the indirectly obvious truth that a radical is in a conversation with reality, common knowledge, and common sense. Radically disposed people do not agree on the boundaries delineating the lifeworld (*Lebenswelt*) generated in the process of socialization. In the wavering consciousness of a radical, this socially created and legitimated consensus is an artificial, unreflective set of superstitions, the only positive function of which is that they give psychic comfort, or the illusion of a coherent vision of the world. A radical's thoughts and feelings obsessively confirm the defects and infirmities, as well as fuel longings, expectations and a sense of grief. Conservative and romantic radicalism, which incorporates the need for rooting and restitution of the foundations, proclaims the possibility and even the necessity of regeneration of the values abandoned sometime in an unspecified past – a kind of "resurrection". However, because this past is foggy and frequently located metaphorically in times of an imaginary

[46] Anthony Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity*, John Wiley & Sons, 2013.

"golden age", it remains unclear where and what it is, hence radicalism ultimately touches upon the mystery of human origins. It finds, in the past exclusively, a very generalized possibility of revising human fate. The pretensions of such a radical will never be satisfied, which in the end results in a never-ending grief. On the other hand, enlightened radicalism, anticipating and directed toward the future, reveals a man lost in his search for the fleeing absolute. While there can be progress, the enlightened radical becomes more and more conscious of the ever-present but never-attainable perfection. The magnitude of the radical expectations stimulates the will to power and excitement, but at the same time it gives rise to a puzzling impression of failure, accompanied by increasingly perplexing feelings of the escaping world and wasted opportunities. This radicalism has a tendency to exacerbate, it dogmatically puts everything on the shelf of novelty, but ultimately it does not win because the project of radical reconstruction never reaches the goal. Enlightened radicalism is also accompanied by feelings of grief.

Third, radicalism is associated with a tendency to take risks. Hence it is not a synonym for destruction. It signifies rather the need to break the domination of the artificial and idiosyncratic orders permanently incorporated into the language and group interests. Radicalism means the need for innovation, and thus openness to what is "foreign" or "peculiar", as opposed to what is "native". Radicalism thus takes on a cognitive significance and transforms it into an experience which Charles Taylor would describe as *epiphanic* – one that reveals an inaccessible truth that only sometimes shines through. It is a conscious effort to search for "borderline situations" and experience them for cognitive purposes. The radical imagination, the attention focused on extreme (i.e. "terminal", "foreign") expressions of human behaviour becomes then the best way to know and experience reality – the basis of philosophical, sociological or political inquiry[47]. In this sense radicalism has always been the direction of the intellectual and artistic avant-garde, which deliberately abandon the conventional and socially-generated images of the world for what is cutting and unique. Such radicalism assumes that reality can be understood by what is outside the borders. Manichaeism and dualism, which according to Plessner portray the suspicious mind of a radical, can thus lead

[47] Razmig Keucheyan, *op. cit.*

paradoxically to openness. Radicalism tames the strangeness, but at the same time like a stranger "(...) shatters the rock on which the security of daily life rests"[48]. Only in this way can man penetrate into the spaces of the mysterious and unknown. Radicalism, contrary to what Plessner assumes, does not proclaim a faith in the "healing power of extremes"[49]. This kind of attitude is characterized by extremism, which presumably in Plessner's understanding is the same. It is difficult however to imagine that the search for the root(s) could be accompanied by certainty and absolute conviction about one's reasoning. Radicalism is rather fraught with risks and is inherently related to uncertainty, in the same way as all inquiries are risky and uncertain. Radicalism is an experience of constant coercion; an experience related to the search for the escaping basis. What seems to be the backbone of the radical mind changes over time only into the next clue, the next trace.

Fourth, radicalism is a feature of people in the 'liminal phase', or to use Victor Turner's formulation – of people in the phase of transition, suspension, and uncertainty[50]. Plessner emphasizes that radicalism is a feature of weak (lower and working classes): excluded, disappointed and awaiting[51]. The impressions of alienation and ineptitude, of being stripped and marked by scarcity, may indicate the identity dilemmas of the radical, who does not accept the world and is feverishly looking for his or her place. Radicalism is a characteristic of people not only dissatisfied with their place in the world, but also of those who are in a state of passage and waiting; of people who for various reasons are in suspension. Thus, for example, the tendency toward radicalism – as Plessner points out – is biologically characteristic of the young, and especially of the progressive youths, who feel the chains, remain in the eternal generational conflict; stripped of unwavering trust and full of the need for love; but without acceptance of the cold, calculating, scepticism, pathos, and alleged progress. Let us add to Plessner's comments that these features are present

[48] Zygmunt Bauman, *Postmodernity and its Discontents*, New York: New York University Press, 1997, p. 10.
[49] Helmuth Plessner, *op. cit.*, p. 6.
[50] Victor Turner, "Liminality and Communitas", in *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure*, Chicago: Aldine Publishing, 1969 pp. 94-113.
[51] Helmuth Plessner, *op. cit.*, p. 25.

in their most complete form in the middle class. The middle class is the most radical social class, in the sense that radicalism means not only increased reflectivity but also a sense of deficit, aroused hopes, a constant sense of inadequacy, the need for innovation, openness to what is foreign, and the willingness to risks. We therefore formulate a proposal that contradicts the common conviction that the middle class is an essential source of stability and equilibrium in liberal democracies. On the contrary, the middle class is the most abundant field of tentativeness and trial-and-error, the environment of risk, initiative, and experimentation. The well-educated, with good salaries, are those aware of the quality of their lives, are most likely to seek, determined, and prepared for sudden twists. The middle class, traditionally regarded as the embodiment of a healthy society, is today becoming a major actor experiencing the uncertainty of modern times. It is not just the economic dangers that make the middle class shrink – it is getting either richer or declassed – but rather that through education and cultural capital it becomes aware of the fragility and conventional nature of the most important narratives of social life. The middle class is particularly exposed to both reactionary and emancipatory trends, and thus it is the social strata where radicalism, as properly understood, can thrive. It is no coincidence – as sociologists point out – that the new social movements which are the source of social radicalism are usually born within the middle classes[52].

Conclusions: the radicalization of modernity and radicalism

It is necessary to rethink the idea of radicalism and restore its original meaning, as it appears not only in Bentham's work but also in many other interpretations referred to in the first part of this article. In short, it may be encapsulated as the attitude of an outspoken reformer. The criticism offered of Plessner's concept makes it possible to see a number of other predilections of a radical "mind set". In modernity this radicalism is awakened in a particular way – it expresses and creates itself at one and the same time. This connection can be better seen and understood through the concept of "double-edged modernity" formulated by Anthony Giddens[53].

[52] *Cf.*: Claus Offe, "New Social Movements: Challenging the Boundaries of Institutional Politics", in *Social Research,* no. 52, 1985, pp. 817-868.

[53] Anthony Giddens, *op. cit.*, p. 10.

Modernity, as the British sociologist writes, is becoming radicalized – it intensifies and dissipates social and institutional relationships, multiplies information and brings about continuous diversification. Perforce, modernity constantly revises the existing conventions – shifting the traditions and leading to different manifestations of disembedding. The extent and speed of changes, the institutional multidimensionality of modernity, and its randomness bring enormous opportunities, but also widespread risks.

In our understanding, this "radicalizing of modernity" increases the radical tendencies and the value of radicalism understood as a set of complex spiritual, psychological and social inclinations. We can witness it in the uncertain expectations, anticipations, openness and hopes of the middle class. Although the radical entity suffers from grief, the modern subject of Giddens bases his or her activity on trust in the correctness of the principles and the credibility of particular individuals. In both cases the subject feels a fundamental lack of a basis and certainty (disembedding) and therefore experiences a paramount deficit and anxiety. In the end, we should add that what the sociologist calls "reflexivity" – that subjects need to stay in touch with the foundations of their own actions, together with the factors of reform and reproduction – not only incarnates the strategy of living in modernity, but also the very essence of radicalism, i.e. applying criticism in the constant process of searching for the roots (*radix*) of life. Giddens himself identifies "radical engagement" as a form of dealing with risk and a way for new embedding[54].

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