

## II. EUROPEAN CIVILIZATION, THE SACRALITY AND SECULARITY

### BETWEEN *SACRUM* AND *PROPHANUM*: AUTHORITY, KNOWLEDGE, DEMOCRACY

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An often underestimated reference point of great importance for understanding of the contemporary social and political consciousness is the rooting of such consciousness in the structures of archaic thinking. In this light, the experience of power becomes a component of a more universal experience of *sacrum*: the establishment of an order, a result of the invasion of holiness – the epiphany – is considered as simultaneous establishment of the world and the truth. *Sacrum*, power, leadership, order, identity, truth, authority and rightness remain integrally interconnected and only the power able to satisfy such total expectations receives the real legitimization. It does not become a party to “a contract” governing the rights and obligations of each side, but rather – in a manner typical for religious or *quasi*-religious act, one unconditionally gives up to such power, commits to it. The contents rooted in the archaic experience of *sacrum*, disguised by the historically younger cultural layers are stemming from deep layers and structures of the social conscience. In particular, in the time of crisis they reveal their presence on multiple occasions, helping various Sons of Lights on their road to power. Such persons, in the eyes of their worshippers hold the monopoly for an alleged higher, exclusive and integral Truth. The authoritarian order, *de facto* excluding the possibility of an authentic dialogue, becomes an alternative for the democratic citizen society – resting upon the assumptions that the individuals are free, mature and independent, willing to take the responsibility for their own fate and for the matters of their communities.

Keywords: authority, democracy, knowledge, power, *profanum*, *sacrum*, truth.

DOI: 10.3846/2029-0187.2009.2.116-125

#### Introduction: The archaic roots of the contemporary political consciousness

An often unrecognized and underestimated and disguised by other overlaying layers reference point of a great importance for better understanding of the contemporary social and political consciousness is the rooting of such consciousness in the structures of archaic thinking and the related experience of *sacrum*, or, in a broader

sense, mythical thinking *sacrum* in general. The analysis of such roots is the subject of research resulting in conclusions presented in this article. The starting point is the analysis of the archaic experience of *sacrum* and the respective understanding of the world, authority and truth. The conclusions are used for recognizing and identifying the presence – usually unconscious and disguised, but, nevertheless, present – of a series of archaic contents in the methods of perception, conceptualization and problematization of the social and political reality. The basic goal of the article is to present the social basis, conditions and consequences of the archaic roots of consciousness of multiple individuals and groups existing in the contemporary society. In his analyses, the author is combining the methods from the area of religion knowledge with the ones taken from political sciences and sociology, and his own ideological and theoretical perspective is defined as opposition of the authentic and degenerate version of the Kantian vision of the proposed world order. The author relates the latter to the society of a democratic citizen, assuming the freedom and maturity of individuals, the former – with a situation when individual and social groups concede its fate for the autocratic, sacralized political power.

The list of texts, comprising the subject base for the paper include classical religion knowledge texts by Rudolph Otto, Mircea Eliade, Leszek Kołakowski, and also the works by Sergei Domnikov and Apollo Kantor, that concentrate on the analysis of relationship between the sphere of religious beliefs and mentality, culture and social life. The important intellectual reference points remain also the philosophical works by Immanuel Kant and Martin Heidegger on one hand, and, on the other hand, the observation of processes occurring in the consciousness and political positions of the contemporary Western societies, including especially those which have only recently joined the community of democratic countries.

### The archaic experience of *sacrum*, world, authority and truth

In the archaic perception and understanding of the reality, its nature, and of the genesis and the character of the existing world order, the invasion, or rather – revelation of holiness is experienced as “establishment of the world”, and the existence “open towards the world” is at the same time, or even most of all, the existence “open towards heaven”. “The true world is always located in between, in the center, in the space of transition between the levels, the connection of three cosmic spheres” (Eliade 1993: 70). This “center of the world”, which connects three worlds: the lower one – chthonic or infernal, the middle one – earthly or phenomenal, and the upper one – heavenly, “leads the underground existence towards heaven” (Cirilot 2000: 115). Being “in the center of the world” invokes the hope to transcend the basic limitations of the human condition and to allow contact with divinity, or even to reach the divinity, but also brings about the intensified threat of regression, plunging into the chaos, a fall into the world of death. As far as the area inhabited by the given community – “our world” – constitutes “a universe”, which remains related to the heavenly *sacrum*, the remaining parts are not a universe, but rather – a threatening “outer world”, chaos, the estranged

space inhabited by monsters and demons, a place requiring organization and sanctification (Eliade 1993: 60–65).

The archaic manner of experiencing and perceiving the world is accompanied by a set of the entire complex of archetypical content, related in particular to the “soul” and the “soul of the world”: sacrality, overcoming of the mutual isolation, alienation, contradictions and conflicts between various elements, types or dimensions of being, combining spirituality with morality and materiality, perceiving the materiality as a symptom of spirituality and *sacrum*, the ability to display the power, centrality of the venue within the world, acting as the sphere of contact of the mundane with the divine, the source of dynamics and transformation of the reality, sacralizing and unifying functions – which make the reality united, holy and full, etc. (Cirlot 2000: 119). Combining those contents with own community and its territory is a very common, perhaps even invariant, part of thinking of multiple peoples and cultures, rooted back in the ancient cosmic religions.

In the structures of archaic thinking, the experience of authority is combined with a more general experience of *sacrum*, and the nature of power is related to the mediation between this – “the lower” – world and that – “the higher” – world. Authority is also displayed through power, able to destroy every opposition, but is also able to establish an order and protect the world from deteriorating into chaos. In such case, the establishment of the order is understood simultaneously as the establishment of the world and establishment of the truth that expresses this order and allows a human being to locate oneself in this order. The ability to maintain and revitalize the ontological order – “our world” – or, if the previous order had fallen apart, the ability to set a new order is then related to the operation and epiphany of *sacrum*, being the source of might, order, law and truth.

Archetype of the Authority: “God-Father and Saint-Ancestor allow to understand it as the thing, which is different in this world” (Домников 2002: 373); “different” not in a simple meaning, but “different” as holy, displaying the God’s power and God’s light. “Authority is a superhuman force acting above the history and the society” (Биллингтон 2005: 120). The presented situation should not seem odd, as: “When a man possesses authority, he becomes the executor of the will of heaven, the representative of higher forces, a medium between the world of the gods and the world of the people. The intermediary function of authority enables them to set the standards and laws” (Домников 2002: 372); however, the authority itself remains elevated above the very standards and the law it is setting. One cannot oppose such authority, one can only serve it. Authority, leadership, order, identity, truth and righteousness remain integrally bound, and only the authority – and the person – able to meet such total expectations can win a true and convincing legitimization. It does not become a party to “a contract” governing the rights and obligations of each side, but rather – in a manner typical for religious or *quasi*-religious act, one unconditionally gives up to such power, commits to it (Faryno 1995: 21–22).

Within the discussed “archetype of authority” – combining the authority with the sacral content, power, law and truth, and making it the only lawful force of social

changes – the society played only the role of a passive and archaic object, remaining under the protection provided from the above and devoid of any individual will. The sphere of religious cult is seen in the following manner: “A human being receives the knowledge about holiness, because it is displayed and turns out to be completely different than the secular things” (Eliade 1996: 7); and in a similar manner, the archaic conscience perceives, experiences and understands the authority.

However, the approaches to authority considered in such a manner bear certain important ambivalence: “they vary from the sense of omnipotence and security, the prolongation of the very self (perceived in such authority. – *M. B.*) and identification with the subject (of authority. – *M. B.*) to hatred towards such authority, dissatisfaction from its helplessness (in such or different cases)” (Кантор 1990: 14). The authority is accepted and rejected, affirmed and negated, it attracts and pushes back... This ambiguity should not seem strange, at least in relation to the religious (or *quasi*-religious) perception and experience of the authority: the experience of *sacrum* is in general the experience of paradox, riddle, mystery, something fascinating, but also scary, invoking hope, posing risk or requiring a sacrifice, tempting and challenging, able to save and release, but also to mislead, requiring awe and remaining a constant danger (Otto 1958: 12–24). It is simultaneously the experience of horror, omnipotence, mystery and strangeness, dependence, conversion, rebirth and joy.

The archaic forms of the experience of *sacrum* do not only intensify, but also ontologically support the meaningful ambivalence related to its inherent experience and symbols of authority: “the state as authority is presented in a form of things sacral: the God-Father, master of the Universe, or Dragon-Snake, the inhabitant of the underground world” (Домников 2002: 373). As an effect, the space of potential results of the actions of authority is extended – the authority can turn a flourishing order into chaos, but it can also overcome chaos, introduce order, initiate a blossoming – not only in a social, but also in ontological dimension. Since “our world” is a universe, each effective attack from the outside or from the underground depths – the revenge of the mythical beast rising against the creative effort of the gods – is a regression to chaos, and each “victory over the aggressor is a reiteration of the exemplary victory of God over the Dragon (i.e. Chaos)” (Eliade 1996: 39).

In the structures of archaic conscience, both archetypes of authority, “Master-God” and “Master-Snake”, are subject to a specific dynamics: in times of deep crisis, “the authority ceases to be associated with a light and is considered as the authority of the Devil (Snake), as the unrighteous authority” (Домников 2002: 250): the bearer of darkness, evil, lie, unlawfulness and death. The restoration of Goodness, Truth, Law and God’s Justice on earth requires the restoration of the previous state, legitimizing in the communal conscience the right to rise against the unrighteous authority in order to reinstate a proper authority: “In such manner, the social activity is determined by the energy of authority and is perceived only as supporting or opposing the Authority (or defying it) in its actions, but always ‘because of’ the authority” (Домников 2002: 374). The reversal of the social pyramid, still considered and understood within binary contradiction of two archetypes of authority, which occurs at times, cannot change

anything and *de facto* translates into the subsequent stages of reproduction and continuation of the present state. The authority and truth are co-assumed; to express the truth is at the same time, at least potentially, to have authority, to possess the creative power, to display the ability to create, shape and maintain the order of “our world”, to create the social order and to legitimize it. The question about the truth is at the same time the question about *sacrum*, power, authority, order, identity and lawfulness.

The sphere of *sacrum* has its own, specific type of perception, combining the moral and cognitive aspects of the acts of perception. “The moral content is provided in the very act of perceiving and understanding that the act is merged with the moral acceptance” (Kořakowski 1982: 190). In general: religion is “a sphere of cult, where understanding, knowledge, sense of participation in the ultimate reality (not necessarily implying a personal God) and the moral obligations appear as a single act, which can be divided into separate classes of metaphysical, moral and other statements, but for the cost of inevitable distortion of the very act of cult” (Kořakowski 1982: 190). In the situation when understanding of the words is identical with the sense of participation in the holy reality, those words – and knowledge (truth), which they express – are perceived as a real transmitter of energy (might and effecting power) from the sphere of *sacrum*.

In many cases, the testimonies of similar connections and identifications – rooted deeply into the history and preserving the impressively rich archaic content – can be found even on the etymological level. To offer a symptomatic example – in Russian language: “a true word” – is by nature “a ‘prophet’ word”, i.e. a part of prophecy, a word spoken in the ‘gathering of the world’; the etymological proximity to the meaning of the words ‘to know’, ‘eternity’ and ‘thing’ is also clear” (KaHTop 1990: 14). Due to the above mentioned, the true word is a word which is at least potentially materialized, embodied, fulfilled and fixed, oriented towards unity with – matching, because shaped by this very word – surrounding, towards the primal identification, a positive opposition to a regular, profane, pragmatic or analytic word.

Then, the truth, just as the authority, is experienced and understood as a symptom: revelation of *sacrum*, where holiness is both the authority and simply the reality, as opposed to what is unreal or pseudo-real. “To be” means at the same time “to participate in the reality”, “to find oneself within the world”, “to recognize and identify oneself in truth”, “to infuse with eternity and strength”. The understanding of both the truth and the power is in a fully natural manner related to the similar totalities of intuition/expectations, connecting *sacrum-prophanum*, power-authority, being-truth, order-identity and lawfulness-legitimization. The experience of truth assumes and implies the moment of regenerative, victorious transition and ontologically understood return to oneself, reinstating the identity. The truth is not understood there as convergence of representation and reality, but as capturing of a real being, triumph of truth and living in truth – “the true being”.

## Archaic roots of the contemporary political conscience

The contents rooted in the archaic thinking and the experience of *sacrum*, disguised by the historically younger cultural layers, remain present in the deep layers and structures of the contemporary social conscience. In particular, they reveal their presence in the time of crisis and become the basis for the understanding of the reality, in particular the social reality, by broad social masses unable to grasp other understanding, conceptualization or to face the challenges of the ever-modernizing world. They also help various Sons of Lights, sharing the presented way of thinking due to their similar inabilities or simply from cynical, compensational, instrumental reasons, etc. on their road to power. Such persons, in their own opinion and in the eyes of their worshippers, are always right and hold the monopoly for an alleged higher, exclusive and integral Truth. They divide the world into Good and Evil, Light and Darkness. They identify the former with what is their own, committed and obedient to them, and the latter – with what is foreign, hostile, destructive, unconquered.

Last centuries of the history of the West are accompanied by a process, not devoid of various forms of camouflage and inconsequence: the secularization of the political, the identification of divergence – and as a result, separation – of the sacral and the political. One of the important aspects of the process is the transgression of the sphere of mythical *coincidentia oppositorum*, understood as ontological and axiological basis, and also the objective and goal of political thinking and actions. As Isaiah Berlin shows, the breakthrough should be attributed to the thinking and approach of Niccolò Machiavelli. All earlier Western thinkers were convinced and tried to prove that there exists only one universal system of values and the related moral system. No one acknowledged that there may exist no single superior criterion which would allow a human being to make rational, univocal choices between different life objectives (Berlin 1986: 254–259).

Machiavelli was the first to transgress the assumption about the basic coherence of all authentic values and the related conviction about the existence of a single formula allowing to match all of these values. In a clear and open manner, he separated the systems of Christian (religious) and secular (political) morality, and emphasized the mutual incoherence and incongruence of the Christian virtues – humility, acceptance of suffering, separation from the worldly affairs, modesty, mercy, etc. – on one hand, and the political virtues – *virtu*, audacity, energy, impudence, calculation, unscrupulousness etc. – on the other hand. The former, as he argued, serve for the post-mortem deliverance of the individuals, but in the world of real politics, they translate to losses and defeats; the latter support political success and the effective execution of political goals, but cannot be reconciled with the rules of Christian morality. Any delusions that it can – or could be – otherwise should be given up; an individual must make their choices and be aware of all the consequences (Berlin 1991: 13–14).

Let us inspect the matter in detail. The most important theoretical works of Machiavelli are in general opinion: *The Prince* and *Discourses on the First Ten Books of Titus Livy*. In the eyes of multiple scholars and researchers, the ideological sense of both works is contradictory: *Discourses* hail the republic, rule of law and citizen liberties, and simultaneously, *The Prince* is a justification of an absolute power, political dictatorship, utilization of the people and laws in an instrumental way, and the coldly calculated ruthlessness of actions.

However, the reading of Machiavelli writings clearly reveals – without prejudice to all modern qualities of his approach and concept – that sense of something archaic, eternal, which combines the experience of power with the experience of *sacrum*. Berlin's emphasis of the seemingly consequent separation of the sphere of *sacrum* and *prophanum* seems to be, at least partially, misleading. The thing is that politics, especially the desired act of uniting of Italy, becomes for him a sphere of specific *sacrum*. As we remember, what is sacral is both fascinating and scary, invokes hope and risk, and generates the characteristically ambivalent approaches (Kelly 1978: xvi–xvii). A human being would like to transgress the boundaries of *prophanum*, to identify with *sacrum* and at the same time ceaselessly delve into it, commit to its service, leave one's principles and scruples, and simultaneously to maintain, strengthen and justify its separation, self-existence and liberty (Eliade 1993: 248–250).

I believe the discussed case is similar. The politics draws Machiavelli – a diplomat, politician, theorist and philosopher – into its gears, and each time conflicts him with religious standards and the rules of morality or even decency. The author of *The Prince* and *Discourses* senses that fact and with determination, at times smelling even of a dramatic self-persuasion, almost on every page attempts to convince the readers, but also himself, about the necessity, even obligation to sacrifice other positions, values and rules for the sake of the “sacred” matter. Therefore, he does not exclude the politics from the sacral sphere, but *de facto* contradicts one *sacrum* to another one. The place of the traditional Christian altar is replaced by the altar of Politics, which he is building himself. In relation to the indicated ambiguity and the related ambivalences, Machiavelli's *casus* assumes highly symptomatic features, which are quite archetypical for the approaches and thinking strongly present and common in the social conscience and the life of societies, especially those which have only recently joined the community of democratic Western countries.

The alternative for the open citizen society – assuming freedom, sense of responsibility for oneself, maturity and independence of individuals, autotelic value of the law, awareness of the necessity to make choices and seek compromise between the colliding values – is then the authoritarian order, *de facto* excluding any authentic dialogue. The group, which subjects such order for the purposes of their domination, exercises power in the name of some promoted common mission, elevated through the references to God and the Highest Values, the national *raison d'être* for the sake of “good of common people” or “well understood” interest of the nation. The religious belief, treated instrumentally, is degenerated, and the promoted fundamentalist slogans shift the Christian content into the structures of the archaic perception of reality and its

respective understanding of the world. Those become the ideological tool in the hands of persons who – while exercising power or claiming the exclusive right to exercise it – usurp the privilege to decide what is holy, righteous, true and moral. It is unlikely that the success of similar forces can be permanent or even long-standing in the environment of the dynamically developing, increasingly complex modern world. With time, *quasi*-archaic content is pushed back outside of the sphere of public discourse and the official ideological formulas – yet they do not perish, but remain dormant, as if waiting for another opportunity.

Beliefs and mysteries, which accompany the experience of *sacrum* – oriented towards the situation of *coincidentia oppositorum* (the state of reconciliation and unification of contradictions, totalization of parts) – express the human striving to transcend beyond the specific situation, to annihilate the existing set of limitations and to achieve a total way of being. Mythical thinking is directed towards the reality of a state, which, if achieved, would liberate human being and human communities from the dramatic collision of values and interests to a state, “where the contradictions exist without clashing, and the variety only constitutes the aspects of a mysterious unity” (Eliade 1993: 248–250). Efforts related to the attempts to achieve the state of *coincidentia oppositorum* have their axiological (they pertain to the sphere of values, which – “properly understood” – are desired with the belief that it is possible to perceive them as mutually reconciled) and ontological dimension (this pertains to the transition from the existing state of reality, marked with contradictions, conflicts, fragmentation, alienation, etc., into a state free from such negative qualities and limitations).

Even a superficial analysis of the contemporary political discussions and expectations shows that the conscience of multiple participants of such activities still remains in the structures of *coincidentia oppositorum*, characteristic for the mythical thinking, and each time is directed to a state, which, if achieved, would seemingly liberate the society and the social life from the collision of values, unavoidable difficult decisions, inevitable self-expenses, etc. If only – as people believe or want to believe – one gives its fate into the hands of the appropriate authority, the opposition of the evil or stupid opponents, hidden or visible enemies, and various dark forces and their dealings will be broken.

In such cases, the image of the world – stylized in different manners, but always own or perceived as proper – is confused with the world itself – allegedly created or possible to be created by the authority: executed, supported or at least desired, current or potential. The assumption for similar illusion stems not only in the tendency, typical for the modern times, to understand the reality as an image of the world, considered as being itself, in its entirety, the way it allegedly is, conclusive and obliging for us (Heidegger 1950: 82–83). A fertile soil for such phenomenon is also the life-wise, intellectual and social helplessness of multiple individuals and groups in the face of complexity and challenges of the contemporary times. Those believe they can manage, reach their goals and satisfy their needs only within the sphere of myth – which they consider to be the reality. On the other hand, the vitality and power of the social



influence of similar ideological structures is supported by those active individuals and groups, which share or instrumentally utilize the similar manner of understanding the world, and, because of that, are able to win and maintain the power, gather the support of others and to legitimize its actions and execute its interests. In such situation, we observe the degenerate version – the opposition – of the Kantian vision of the proposed world order as a whole, and, in particular, the degenerate concept of state, originally assuming the subjectivity, sensibility, autonomy, autotelic value and non-instrumental treatment of the human being and its participation in common law making processes (Kant 1965: 55–60). In the discussed case, the order is proposed in such a manner, so as to release oneself from the burden of responsibility, to create an illusion of an easy or definite solvability of the experienced problems, contradictions and limitations, and *de facto* to pursue its particular interests. It does not seem that the promoters or followers of similar visions and ideologies could (in the foreseeable future of many societies) disappear.

### Conclusions: Between *sacrum* and *prophanum* – blurring and the need for boundaries

It would be unjustified to relate the examples of archaic rooting and involvement of the contemporary social and political consciousness simply with the inconsequent character of the processes of desacralization or de-christianization of mentality and social positions of individuals observed in the last centuries. The phenomena discussed in the article are related not only with the religious experience in general (or the Christian religious experience in particular), but rather with the archaic perception of the world, which blurs the boundaries between *sacrum* and *prophanum*, eschatology and history, soteriology and politics, God's power and political authority, etc. The mythical thinking becomes the integral form for understanding, explaining and problematizing the reality mostly for those who are unable to understand the reality and solve their individual and common problems in any other way. The resulting threat applies both to the democratic order and open citizen society and the Christianity forced – in an unconscious or instrumental manner, into ideological forms of the archaic, *de facto* neo-pagan vision of the world.

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## TARP SACRUM IR PROFANUM: AUTORITETAS, ŽINOJIMAS, DEMOKRATIJA

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Santrauka

Archainio mąstymo struktūros yra labai svarbus, tačiau nepakankamai įvertintas veiksnys, apmąstant šiuolaikinę socialinę ir politinę sąmonę. Archainio mąstymo aspektu valdžios patirtis tampa kur kas universalesnės *sacrum* patirties sudedamąja dalimi. Tvarkos įsteigties, šventenybės išiveržties pasekmė – epifanija – čia nagrinėjama kaip vienalaikė pasaulio ir tiesos steigtis. *Sacrum*, valdžia, lyderystė, tvarka, tapatumas, tiesa, autoritetas ir teisingumas išlieka neatsiejamai susieti, ir tik per valdžią galima realizuoti tikro teisėtumo lūkesčius. Taip teisėtumas tampa ne būdu manipuliuoti abiejų pusių teisėmis ir išpareigojimais, bet religiniu ar kvazireliginiu aktu, besąlygiškai išpareigojančiu ir paklūstančiu valdžiai. Turinius, išaknytus archainėje *sacrum* patirtyje, užkloja naujesnieji kultūriniai sluoksniai, besipriešinantys gilesniesiems socialinės sąmonės sluoksniams ir struktūroms. Krizės metu tie turiniai atsiskleidžia daugeliu atvejų, įkvėpdami pačius įvairiausius Šviesos Sūnus, siekiančius valdžios. Tokie asmenys savo garbintojų akyse saugojo aukštesniosios, išskirtinės ir vienatinės Tiesos monopolį. Autoritarinė tvarka, *de facto* steigianti autentiško dialogo galimybę, tampa demokratinės pilietinės visuomenės alternatyva, paremta prielaidomis, esą individai yra laisvi, brandūs ir nepriklausomi, gebantys priimti atsakomybę už savo pačių ir savųjų bendruomenių likimus.

Reikšminiai žodžiai: autoritetas, demokratija, žinojimas, valdžia, *profanum*, *sacrum*, tiesa.

*Received 22 July 2009, accepted 4 November 2009*