Maria Dimitrova

Sociality and Justice

Toward Social Phenomenology

Maria Dimitrova

SOCIALITY AND JUSTICE

Toward Social Phenomenology

∞

Gedruckt auf alterungsbeständigem, säurefreien Papier
Printed on acid-free paper

Printed in Germany

Table of Contents

Introduction[1]

In modernity, people began to identify themselves through their belonging in society striving to go beyond provincial borders and following a new sense of cosmopolitanism, i.e., of universality. They aspired to find the general essence of all people on the planet and to spread this kind of humanity amongst humankind. Modernity allowed efforts to be directed firstly at establishing what it is that applies to "everyone". In modern philosophy, the basic social relation was expressed by the formula "the individual and society", ignoring the intermediary role of communities and the irreducible diversity of individuals. In postmodernity this main opposition between individual and society remains, but efforts are being made to restore the rights of particular community, groups, and individuals which in previous epochs were ignored or renounced in the name of the protection of the totality.

Zygmunt Bauman explains that the freedom of "the universal man" in modernity was understood by replacing the colourful diversity of parishioners, family and other local people with "citizens". The citizen is a person with attributes which are bestowed upon him or her by a sole and undisputed authority, acting in the name of the united and sovereign nation-state. The postulate of human essence as a universality of reason corresponded with the ambitions and actions of the modern nation-state in its battle mediating between localised authority figures and individuals whom it wished to subdue. This was a battle against local customs, labelling them *superstitions*; local languages, calling them *dialects*; local markets, describing them as anti-competitive, and, local regulations which were linked to primitivism of the tradition. All had to concede and

subordinate themselves to the common currency of centralized government. The rule of state power spread across all subjects of the territory within its jurisdiction.[2] Of course, the legitimacy of a modern state is conferred with reference to reason and declared universal. So reason itself becomes identical to and identifiable with the state's interest; in turn, becoming indistinguishable with the interest of what Pierre Bourdieu calls "state nobility".

However, to recognize only those directives that can stand the test of universality is a task doomed to fail. Universality means ex-territoriality and ex-temporality implying a rejection time and place related to particular claims which, by virtue of their limitations, come into conflict with each other and also with the proclaimed universal interest:

> While promoting ostensibly universal, yet by necessity home-grown and home-bound standards, the polity finds itself opposed and resisted in the name of the selfsame principle of universalism which enlightens and/or ennobles its purpose. Promotion of universal standards then looks suspiciously like suppression of human nature and tends to be censured as intolerance.[3]

Universality (or civilization, where civilization is understood as the pursuit of the ideal of universality) protects itself through its self-empowerment and by alienating those who were not sufficiently universalised (civilized) by exercising pressure and coercion upon them. When standards of universalization were already adopted, and the mandated central authority felt unchallenged, it began to introduce different policies, allowing the inclusion and recognition of the previously unrecognized and excluded. Usually this was implemented, and is still implemented today, through techniques of integration and/or of pluralisation. The principle of universality, which until then was being promoted by overcoming many difficulties and obstacles and demoting the various local and particular differences, began to be seen as a principle of totalitarianism

---

[2]   Zygmunt Bauman. *Postmodern Ethics*, Blackwell, 1995, p. 39

[3]   Ibid., p. 41

where the state forcibly unifies, homogenizes and excludes.[4] It was believed that these totalitarian tendencies could be corrected by embracing ethnic or cultural diversity and perhaps even replacing them with more pluralism in all spheres of public life. Pluralism, however, despite of any tolerance and respect for diversity which it can bring, as a negation of unity, is only a reaction, led, perhaps under protest, by the discourse which privileges totality. Pluralisation opposes totalitarianism by presupposing it. Diversification and recognition of differences take place against a backdrop of universalisation and usually establishes a second, reflexive level of discourse, which cannot take place without recognition of totality, embedded in its foundation.

Pointedly, modernity proclaims the inclusion of all people into a presupposed citizenship and the equality of all citizens within the state. This is done by neutralizing differences. Many see the hidden roots of this neutralization in the tendency of the market to give quantified expression to qualitative characteristics through valuation. Qualitative differences are reduced to their monetary equivalence so that the natural movement of capital leads to homogenization, depersonalization, unification etc.[5] Nevertheless, although this tendency is maintained today (due to the logic of capital), a critique of homogenization has arisen proclaiming that general rules and laws which apply equally to all, as suggested in early modernity, do not sufficiently take into account individual or group characteristics. It is evident that differences are of utmost importance first of all for the marketing. In a globalizing world, the politics and culture of differences are in opposition to the culture and poli-

---

[4]   According to most theorists, under totalitarianism there can not be real private life due to the state intervention in every aspect of the life of individuals; it is often omitted that under totalitarian rule life is always incurably dual—official, public, parade, on the one hand, and private, dissident, informal, on the other.

[5]   For example, differences between women and men were neutralized in order for women to be included in the economic life as a workforce equal to men.

tics of unification and strive to replace them. In reality, however, as Bauman stresses, globalization processes go hand in hand with those of localization.[6]

As globalisation develops, the first indications to seize the attention of analysts are the openness of identity and the "fluidity" of the whole. Individuals and groups are understood as identification-processes and not as something pre-given or determined by static individual and/or group features which units them formally in a closed substantial whole. They are grasped rather as temporary "identifications", constructed and relatively mobile. Indeed, contemporary communities, unlike earlier ones, are based on pluralism as their own immanent principle to a much greater degree than before. Nowadays societies are multi-racial, multi-national, multi-ethnic, multi-cultural, etc. In such an environment of pluralisation, fragmentation, hybridization, universality as a symbol of humanity and human rights, if not entirely obsolete, is not sufficient on its own.

Formal justice which classifies particular cases under an universal law, is already unsatisfactory.[7] In debates on the topics of universality and particularity, of formal equality and special rights, two different concepts prevail, often rendering mutually exclusive interpretations of the problem: (1) from the liberal perspective, according to which the citizen is an autonomous person whose rights and obligations are guaranteed and realised through public institutions and, (2) on the other hand, from the communitarian perspective, defining citizens through their membership in the community and their attitudes towards its values. In both cases, the relation between the individual and society remains, and

---

[6]   See Zygmunt Bauman. *Globalization: The Human Consequences*. Polity Press, 1998.

[7]   To continue with the example given above, it is believed that female workers should be granted special rights with regard to motherhood. In the same way the specificity of the group is considered for people with disabilities, immigrants, ethnic minorities, etc., receiving status and rights tailored to their needs and capabilities.

what has to be negotiated is how the particularity and universality of individuals and different groups can be reconciled in favour of their joint participation in the whole of society.

In this work social relation is perceived not as a connection between the individual and society (as this relation was habitually articulated and society was thought, and still is thought, as a totality stretching far beyond the individual), but is seen primarily as a relation of one individual *to* another. This does not mean that group and inter-group relations are ignored. Rather, we begin at the premise that the individual *in concreto* enters into relations with other individuals, and only then is connected *in abstracto* (i.e. through principle, by law, through the general notions, standards, norms) and therefore, indirectly, to social institutions, community, society and humanity as a whole.

This book will discuss an approach where the main relation is the interpersonal connection and in order to understand the whole, we proceed from intersubjectivity. The ultimate goal is not the understanding of the totality or of the individual within totality, but one's own responsibility for the Other as the primary human attitude toward him—on the base of it is composed totality. The whole is placed at the service of the Other (not of man in general, but the Other in its uniqueness); however, this service is always personalized as the totality itself cannot respond and act; always the individuals respond to other individuals, think and act. However, the I and the Other are not equal and intersubjectivity is not a reciprocal nor symmetrical relation. To quote Levinas, I always have one more responsibility than the Other. The responsibility for the Other is constitutive for my Self, while the responsibility of the Other for me is his own business. Totality, the state, society and community, obtain and update their meaning if the I, which embodies them as "individualized society" (a famous phrase of Pierre Bourdieu) behaves responsibly towards the Other. However, what does behaving responsibly mean?