



PAWEŁ GRAD

TRADITION AS A COMMUNICATION SYSTEM. A PRAGMATIC APPROACH

1. Introduction

Modern culture defines itself in temporal terms: the modern means “the newest”. A modern consciousness is a consciousness of time, a consciousness of the history. In modern times, history — an experience of time as a change — replaces tradition, which is an experience of time as a repeating order. A naive opposition between ‘tradition’ and ‘modernity’ is constitutive not only for modern common sense, but also for modern social and human sciences.

Tradition is perceived as the authority of the past over the present, which legitimizes its reign not by means of reasons but a pure presence. In contrast, it is a great modern ambition to rule over the present by means of rational reasons of present day. From Spinoza and Kant to Habermas and Brandom, the philosophical concept of rationality had deep influence on the modern political philosophy. Under this influence ‘tradition’ became a socio-philosophical unit of description, which refers to a pre-modern residuum of the past in the modern society and rationality. Tradition exists thanks to custom and repetition. History exists thanks to conscious action and reason. This is the modern narration about tradition.

But we can examine this modern idea of tradition from a different angle. I will provide a philosophical reevaluation of this important concept in contemporary social science. The aim of this short paper is to provide a sketch of more detailed picture of the concept of tradition, *i.e.* the description of communicative rules and structures, which constitute the rationality of tradition. I argue that tradition as a communication system has a fully rational structure. My main claim is that communicative structure of tradition has a rational structure of

language game. This structure includes defined principles of communication for members of closed tradition-grounded community and rule of inclusion for potential new members. The aim of establishing this two-leveled structure is to (1) secure the external constitutive knowledge and practice for members of traditional community and (2) to define conditions of inclusion for outsiders. In consequence the structure of tradition as communication system is divided: rules of language game are different for members of community and for outsiders. The tradition is an exclusivist (or better: reflective-inclusivist) system of discourse, because it is based on presupposition that universal communicative community could be only a historical coincidence and not a transcendental necessity. This is a constitutive feature of tradition concept and the point of the greatest difference between them and a reason-oriented Enlightenment idea of the universal society.

A context of my paper is the debate on reason, tradition and traditional communities (MacIntyre 1988; 1990; Shils 1981; Giddens 1994), in which this moral and epistemological issues were discussed as a part of general socio-philosophical theory of modernity. In particular I intend to locate my considerations in the context of formal-pragmatic theory of modern communicative rationality developed by Jürgen Habermas along with his critique of tradition- and ritual-oriented communication of pre-modern communities (Habermas 1987, 43–77). The purely philosophical expression of similar ideas can be found in the work of Robert Brandom (Brandom 2009, 60). I will provide a competitive model of the rationality of tradition by applying a conceptual toolkit of pragmatically oriented analysis to explain practices connected with vocabulary of tradition.

Although the notion of ‘tradition’ became the *locus communis* of humanities and today refers to almost ‘anything, which comes from past’ (Shils 1981, 12), I use them in an accordance with a more defined tradition of usage. The theoretical model presented below fits ethical and religious systems founded on the memory about exemplary events from the past: e.g. ancient Greek virtue ethics or Christian doctrine. The classic philosophical formulations of this traditions are *Nicomachean Ethics* by Aristotle, *Summa theologiae* by Thomas Aquinas and — among more recent works — *After virtue* by Alasdair MacIntyre.

Firstly I consider closely internal principles of communication within the framework of tradition contrasting them shortly with normative-deontic rules of the postenlightenment idea of pragmatic communication discussed by Jürgen Habermas and Robert Brandom. After that I examine the rule of inclusion — the rule, which mediates between closed system of tradition-based community and his environment.

2. Principles of communication

An binding character of some particular, historical and contingent events is the cornerstone of the tradition system. If a community recognizes some historical event as an embodiment of universally committed truths, this event became pattern for action and beliefs. This feature set apart the concept of tradition from all rationalistic projects of the modern political thought from Spinoza, through Kant to Rawls and Habermas. Tradition tends to secure classical or even sacred deposit of the original event, and not to establish universal political community. All communication inside the communicative system of tradition (CST) is guided by principles, which serves to (a) sustain the memory about this original event, to (b) reproduce knowledge, which should be not contradictory to normative core of this memory and to (c) provide the universal narration about history founded on this memory. The principle (a) establishes the tradition as communication system, (b) reproduces it and (c) enables an expansion of tradition.

(a) Each user of CST, who communicates with the other user of CST as the user of CST, has to acquire not only formal-universal language skills but also accept material presuppositions, which include set of claims about content of the received tradition. This content is the tradition in the objective sense (the deposit) or the doctrine. The tradition as doctrine is the object of the reflective operation of exclusion from contestation, *i.e.* the object of canonization. The canonization on the level of pragmatics is the shift of some contingent truths to the domain of truths, which have to be accepted to enable users of CST to play a traditional language game properly. The meaning of this contingent historical event became part of inferential basis of communication inside CST. The accumulated knowledge acquired in

historical process became — as the tradition — a constitutive part of presuppositions shared by all users of CST.

(PMO) The commitment to agree with defined set of material claims (the doctrine) as an inferential basis of CST is the principle of material obligation (PMO).

From this point of view, to be fully rational — *i.e.* to be able to infer all relevant conclusions — is to share necessary material basis, which is the core of the tradition, e.g. the particular definition of virtues or divine revelation. Reaching all important conclusions in CST requires a relatively broad basis of common beliefs, which enable members of CST to infer relevant claims concerning a current practice. Because from the formal-pragmatic angle it is impossible to reach important conclusions without this material basis of inference, disagree with this basis (the doctrine) effects not only a disagreement inside some framework between users of communication, but also disability to share necessary part of CST framework and in consequence disability of infer proper conclusions.

The free communicative system (FCS), theorized by Jürgen Habermas, among others, to meet requirements of the modern rational debate in public sphere, presupposed no material basis of discourse. The whole inferential basis of FCS includes only formal principles of normative rightness, theoretical truth and subjective truthfulness (Habermas 1984, 8–42) which works on material content of beliefs delivered at every turn by participants of the communicative action. There is no common ‘doctrine’ for FCS and this universal ambition is one of the principles of FCS (Habermas, 1998, 42). This feature FCS suits very well to the shape of modern pluralistic political communities. Form-oriented model of communication serves to secure the social interaction between subjects and groups, whose material content of belief is diversified and potentially conflicting. In consequence, to participate in a universal discourse — which is the kind of universal reason — is to translate the particular, historically-rooted beliefs into the universal, reasonable points of view. But this is not a translation without loss. The guiding principle of FCS is the principle of intersubjective cooperation, while guiding principle of CST is a principle of conservation of the objective content. CST focuses on integrity of

identity and relegates the problem of social cooperation to the external institutions (e.g. the state). FCS perceives the problem of socio-cooperative function of the discourse as a primary problem of communication and subordinate them the problem of identity. Habermas express it clearly:

Traditionally established obligations rooted in communicative action do not *of themselves* reach beyond the limits of the family, the tribe, the city, or the nation. However, the reflexive form of communicative action behaves differently: argumentation of its very nature points beyond all particular forms of life. For in the pragmatic presuppositions of rational discourse or deliberation the normative content of the implicit assumptions of communicative action is *generalized, abstracted, and freed from all limits* — the practice of deliberation is extended to an inclusive community that does not in principle exclude any subject capable of speech and action (...) (Habermas 1998, 40–41).

If we perceived FCS and CST from the pragmatic angle as kinds of goal-instrumental rationality, we can claim that because of different goals this two types of rationality choose different means to achieve different goals.

(b) Each user of CST, who communicates with the other user of CST as the user of CST and accepts PMO, is obligated to infer from this material basis only these claims that do not contradict the doctrine and all previous claims inferred from the doctrine. Proper usage of CST requires not only the commitment to give reasons for previous statements of individual CST-user, but also the commitment to meet requirements of law of non-contradiction between these claims and all material content of doctrine and previous inferences inside CST as a whole. This kind of normative-grounded rationality is expressed as a commitment to responsibility for previous claims (Brandom 2008, 43). A historical set of claims included in the doctrine functions here as an inferential basis, and each user of CST has to accept CST properly. Thereby historically inherited doctrine works as set of claims, for which each user of CST is responsible.

(PO) *The commitment to generate new claims without contradiction with inferential basis of CST is the principle of orthodoxy (PO).*

PO is a generative principle which enables users of CST to adopt the communicative action to the changing context of practice by means of generating new claims on the basis of PMO. PO is the natural consequence of PMO, because it enables CST users to generate new CST-claims in accordance with the shared doctrine. PO constitutes a continuity of narration between original historical event (source) and the user of CST most removed from the source in time. This principle has high costs, because the temporal scope of claim-responsibility here is very wide and stretches over the long historical period. Each user of CST under PO is obligated to treat each authoritative, valid claim ever generated by CST as a potential reason of his own claims.

In FCS there is also a normative structure of commitments, which make rational beings (conscious users of language) responsible for their previous claims and his consequences. Each user of FCS is obligated to respect the principle of logical unity (non-contradiction) of his statements. '(...) This sort of practice or process of sequential rational integration of new commitments into a constellation of prior commitments institutes normative statuses of authority and responsibility according to the model of reciprocal recognition' (Brandom 2009, 87). In the framework of FCS can we find the crucial notions of CST — authority and responsibility — transformed. But as regards FCS, this is self-authority of each rational user of FCS, who respects the rule of giving and asking for reasons to meet the requirements of model of rationality based on reciprocal recognition. User of CST have to meet requirements of model of rationality based on normative character of the historical authority. A difference between CST and FCS is — in Brandom's own words — the difference between 'the obedience' and 'the autonomy' (Brandom 2009, 60). The aforementioned FCS-responsibility is the responsibility for his own prior claims, and not for historically contingent and inherited claims of a doctrine.

In both cases, the real source of structural difference between CST and FCS lies in the temporal scope of these commitments. This scope in FCS is projected for the situation of the single exchange of reasoning in *one* conversation. The ideal type of FCS-communicative action is a free discussion between rational individuals. Hence, the assumed period of responsibility is the one of rational conversation —

ideal user of FCS is obliged to be responsible for his claims and reasons from this one communicative situation. Because of that Brandom could define the rational authority as virtue of being responsible for *his own* statements. In case of CST, the scope of responsibility includes all prior valid CST-claims from the time of foundational event of tradition, and this scope extends constantly. There is no possibility of re-setting the system of reasons and presuppositions before each communicative action, as in the case of FCS. FCS is more flexible, but also generates weaker subject-identity (if we agree that narrative continuity constitutes personal identity) than CST.

There is a deep philosophical source of connection between these integrating principles of discourse and a personal identity. Brandom identifies Kant's original synthetic unity of apperception (OSUA) with the pragmatic ability of 'integrating the content in question into the whole that comprises all of one's commitments in the light of the relations of material consequence and incompatibility they stand in to one another' (Brandom 2009, 4). OSUA was for Kant not only the intellectual, transcendental ability, but also a source of the self-identity: 'I am, then, conscious of the self as identical, as regards the manifold of the presentations given to me in an intuition, because I call them one and all *my* presentations that make up *one* presentation' (Kant 1966, 179). FCS is grounded in the rational self of each user, and each user is a bearer of necessary abilities to constitute FCS. The matrix of integration of all claims in CST is the trans-individual, historical structure of doctrine derived from the remote source, which is something external to the self and could be accepted only by an act of obedience. The CST self is not only detranscendentalized but also radically dependent: the user of CST acquires his identity by participation in the trans-individual historical structure of doctrine, which unfolds itself in accordance with PMO and PO.

This difference between individual-oriented FCE and transindividual structure of CST leads us to the last principle of CST.

(c) Each user of CST using the PMO and PO is obliged to generate descriptions and explanations, which should be not only expressions of his private, biographically rooted practices, but also an expression of public, historically rooted practices of community based on a particular CST. Integrative PO structures communicative actions of the CST-user as a part of historical, transindividual structure of communicative

situation stretched over the whole history — this structure is the tradition. Each individual action and biographies can find his expressions in CST, but only because they became part of this historical structure constituted by PMO and PO. CST can expand and explain new situations by providing this comprehensive historical narration including each individual biography.

(PMN) The obligation to generate narratives extended individual practices on basis of PMO and PO is the principle of metabiographical narration (PMN).

Historical remoteness of the foundational event of tradition and long work of CST over generations provide great collective memory for the CST-user, who finds out his own identity in the confrontation with obtaining doctrine and patterns of explanation and action reproduced by CST. The liberal distinction between the private self and the public appearance of the citizen (historically consistent along with the rationalistic ideal of autonomy) does not work in the framework of CST, where the self is constituted by the subordination to external structures of tradition: the “centre” of self in CST is located outside the individual. Each narration provided by the CST-user is a description and explanation of private practices only because it is an implementation of description and explanation of inherited, publicly known practices of CST-community. If the paradigmatic task of FCS-user is to make the implicitly-present practices explicit in the public sphere of free discussion, the paradigmatic task of CST-user is to make the doctrine explicitly-expressed in CST implicit by internalizing them as the practice.

Thanks to this last principle of CST it became clear that the anthropological presupposition of CST is that humans as dependent beings realize their rational nature by the mediation of their actions in historical and contingent narrations. This means that the liberation from natural constraints is possible thanks to the act of obedience and by perfection in received (and not invented) system of virtues. CST based on this presupposition works on three aforementioned principles, which set them apart from FCS connected with modern political theories. But to establish CST it is necessary to construct an

ideal situation of inclusion, which works as a normative presupposition of participation in CST. Now I attempt to focus on this point briefly.

3. The rule of inclusion

The CST's principles of communication form a coherent system, but ability of using them is acquired only after the acceptance of entry requirements. The formal description of entrance to CST is provided by the rule of inclusion (RI).

The fundamental structural solution of CST is to distinguish between system and environment, between community accepting demanding principles of communication and all others. Because by this fundamental aim the CST framework secures the possibility of full expression of identity based on a particular narration, CST generates rigid borders of the doctrine, which discriminates users of CST and others. The most problematic communication situation emerges at the point where CST connects with his environment. RI regulates the communicative action in this sphere.

In accordance with RI there is no universal communicative situation, *i.e.* there is no possibility to fully grasp some important claims without prior the acceptance of some reasons only on the ground of obedience. In particular, important moral knowledge is available only after the long process of perfection, which is not a pure intellectual teaching but primary a disciplinary exercise. To follow the rule in this discipline is to accept an external authority — namely accept the PMO. In the situation of decision and inclusion to CST, potential CST-user has not a full transparency in matter of all reasons of the accepted doctrine. This transparency (ability to explain a structural relationship between the accepted practice and the doctrine) is the remote aim, and not the presupposition of inclusion.

(RI) Instead of cognitive transparency, potential CST-user has a pragmatic transparency of inputs and out puts. He put in his cognitive indeterminacy in by accepting PMO and successive principles. He put out set of defined practices and explanations along with declaration of successive gain of understanding of doctrine and his own identity. The rule of this exchange is RI.

Prospective users of CST constrain their material basis of inference by accepting the doctrine (this is their input), but in exchange they receive a complex system of explanations and descriptions, which could be tested in practice (this is their output).

A modern ideal of communication between free, rational subjects is the ideal of universal, inclusivist debate. All differences of identity between individuals should be left behind the public debate, which bases on universal forms of reasoning. Users of FCS debate have a cognitive transparency of communication — each of them should be able to give and ask for reasons all statements, which are used in the communication. Habermas expresses this principle in following way: “I have called the type of interaction in which *all* participants harmonize their individual plans of action with one another and thus pursue their illocutionary aims *without reservation* ‘communicative action’” (Habermas 1984, 294).

The tradition system works differently. CST is overtly exclusivist. A traditional community defines a set of material presuppositions, which have to be accepted by everyone who wants to become a member of this community. Instead of cognitive transparency, potential users of CST have a pragmatic transparency of inputs and outputs. They forfeit their indeterminacy of identity and beliefs — this is input of potential users of tradition-system. In return they receive as an output definite and coherent set of beliefs, which can be used as an inferential base for description of his actions. They cannot understand these beliefs before they accept them. Because of that there is no cognitive transparency in the mechanism of inclusion to the communicative system of tradition. A definite set of beliefs (tradition in objective sense) is accepted because prospective user of tradition expect to understand cognitive content of tradition, it means he expect to be able to explain his actions in terms form framework of tradition.

This rule of inclusion describes situation of a rational decision, in which cognitive risk — connected with acceptance of arguments *ex auctoritate* — is an element of the broader structure of rational exchange. The rational exchange based on publicly know rules is a proper form of rationality of tradition. This is the rationality of language game, in which individuals receive cognitive profit in return for subordination for defined doctrine.

The structure of rule of inclusion is implicitly present in crucial notions of traditional religious or ethical systems. A good example of practical usage of rule of inclusion is the institution of dogmatic condemnation in Catholic Church. Magisterium of Church defines strict line of doctrine and exclude all beliefs, which lays outside them as a heresy. The condemnation is officially proclaimed and publicly known. This mechanism enables all users of the public debate to know what is exactly required to be a member of Catholic Church, which means to assert defined set of beliefs. We used to focus on disciplinary consequences of condemnations, but this discursive consequences are equally important. They are even the most important, if we try to understand formal structure of tradition as a communicative system.

RI is not a rule of the cognitive operation which could be justified in the light of autonomous reason. Indeed, the pragmatic mediation of rationality implicitly present in the whole CST structure (together with RI) is contradictory to this postenlightenment framework. To choose between CST with RI and FCS with egalitarian model of reason is to choose between two models of rationality and not between the reason and the unreason.

After the inclusion to the CST the user is obliged to play the CST communication game following the CST principles of communication. This requirement is clearly expressed and whole system of exclusions and boarder marks (anathemas, condemnations, dogmatic definitions) is constructed in order to secure this obligation. The FCS is projected to reduce the differences in highly pluralistic community. Full realization of FCS establish posttraditional communicative community, in with *traditional* identities (doctrines and practices) appears only as *historical* objects of the potential, private choice of users of FCS. To make traditional practices explicit, *i.e.* to provide fully rational explanation of tradition, it is required to use the vocabulary respecting material obligations of traditional doctrine and practices. In other words, to treat the tradition as the tradition, and not as *historical object*, is to express tradition in his own vocabulary and not in the translation of private practice to vocabulary of public, universal and 'rational' beliefs. The traditional practices and tools after the reevaluation in liberal public discourse basing on FCS became historical objects and tools of functional securing private beliefs. This is what appears in the modern society as a "tradition" — incomprehensible but functionally

necessary object from the past. To make reasons and aims of this tradition explicit is to express particular and historically contingent identities; it is to make a difference in a universal communicative community. From the point of view of FCS all differences are perceived as potentially dangerous source of social conflict. In consequence the public discourse in FCS turns out to be a *pragmatic* cooperation in order reduce the difference by a mutual consensus.

The CST bases on the difference. To sustain the difference between system and environment is the structural aim of CST, which reflects in the communicative and cognitive structures of CST. CST absorbs cost of reinforcing the difference providing two-stage model of communication and relegate the different out of the community. FCS solve the same problem by abolish the important differences at all.

4. Conclusion

As we see, the pragmatics of the tradition as a communication system is available to the philosophical explanation. CST is structured by the particular set of communicative principles: the principle of material obligation, principle of orthodoxy and principle of metabiographical narration. All of them are used to achieve a pre-discursive aim, which is securing the moral progress and enquiry by establishing the unquestionable basis of material presuppositions. This unquestionable basis became the core of the doctrine, which constitutes closed system of traditional community. Communication between this community and external environment of society is regulated by the rule of inclusion, which works as rule for language game of rational exchange between new users of CST and CST. The logic of this game is the rational core of CST.

CST perceive the freedom of action and thought as the process of education in a particular tradition, which enables them to use will and reason freely by instructions of the doctrine. FCS perceive the freedom as ability to using natural reason to recognize and express inner needs of person. This is the point of greatest difference between framework of tradition and modern framework of rationality. The solution of this disagreement is out of scope of this paper, but my considerations enable us to understand better the presuppositions, structural

differences and cost of theoretical solutions of this two coherent frameworks.

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KEYWORDS: rationality, inferentialism, tradition, modernity.