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Identity as a Dialogue

Introduction to the issue

Present days are often called, not only in social scientific, but also in publicistic discourse, as the time “crisis of identity”, “identity uncertainty” or “identity panic”.¹ When it come to subjects, such characteristics are accredited to, authors consider both, larger social units (social groups, classes, communities, but – after all – it’s possible to consider it as the identity crisis of the Western society as it is) as well as each individual.

Within the context of our consideration, it’s necessary to differentiate between the way how we perceive ourselves as members of certain group – this is our **social identity** (we feel and understand certain **similarity** within certain group), and the way how we understand our difference (so the **differences** versus other members of the group) – here we mean our **individual identity**.²

This text will be focused, in particular, on **social (collective, group) identity** as a manner each society in the history recognized itself by, that used to offer and still offers the basis for the formation of collective and individual (as a result) behaviour patterns, beliefs, expectations, perceptions and evaluations. There is no dispute about the meaningfulness and utility of collective social identity; however, the more crucial problem is – in our opinion – **how to understand its formation**; as this term can be found within “ontological” or even “proprietary” contexts very frequently: identity “is”...“, “we have (he/she has) identity...” etc., as if it was something final, given “condition” forever, some kind of a fixed characteristic that may be “accepted” from the outside and then “owned,” but it can be also “lost” or “alienated” from any person...

We believe that the social identity shall be understood as a **dynamic procedure of self-constitution of a collective subject**. Identity within this meaning **may not be “grafted”**, nor it **may be kept by external (outside) instruments permanently** – either by spiritual or power instruments. In philosophical words, we may understand the process of identification as the process of **shaping** where the “shape” can be understood not only as an outer, but also inner meaningfulness of respective subject, process, whose ground is to look for and execute the **order** constituting respective subject. Therefore, none of the subjects “has” the identity, as in every sense of this word it’s “**not**”, but it’s “**happening**” in permanent confrontation with other social groups and individuals, and so it’s a procedure of its own creation

¹ Few of these terms are used e.g. by Václav Bělohradský in his publicistic and expert literature.

² Comparison with e.g. TESARĚ, Filip. *Etnické konflikty*. Praha: Portál, 2007, p. 53.

and transformation. This formation movement is always happening in mutual interaction of opposite, but complementary factors: individual and collective, contents and form, reflected and experienced.

Our study has its objective set to map, at least partially, the **philosophical and cultural-anthropologic basis for the process of formation of social identity in a way we understand it within the context of development of Western philosophy**. In our opinion, it's not meaningless in these days, when the relativization of values and rules is becoming almost "fancy" and as if the identity disbalance of the Western society was calling us for a repetitive return to our (in particular to the Greek ones) spiritual roots.

Archetype of shaping

Mircea Eliade has already been writing about the crucial need of archaic societies to find, keep and protect the borders between the sacral and profane space (and time), i.e. between the one that is cultivated, systematic (sacred by an intervention of higher, divine force), and the one that is not cultivated, not systematic (ordinary, usual, human). According to a deeply adopted belief of archaic human, "the first is 'the World' (or more specifically 'our World'), the Cosmos; while the second is not a cosmos, but some 'other world', some space that is strange, chaotic, bogeymen, demons or 'strangers' live there (that are compared to demons and souls of the dead)."¹ Naturally, the mentioned deep feeling of an archaic thinking was reflected on the expansion strategy, conquest – so into "uniformity creation" – as the only legitimate way how to "erase strangeness" or how to "negate difference". Eliade writes: "The unknown, strange, unsettled land (unsettled often means: not settled by 'our people') participates on the unstable and born modality of 'Chaos'. Thus, man occupies certain land, but predominantly by the fact that he settles there, changes it symbolically through a ritual repetition of cosmogony into a Cosmos."²

But let's not stay only within the context of archaic societies; cultural anthropology, it looks like, confirms that the "shaping" is a universal characteristic – maybe we could speak directly about an **anthropological constant**, based on a deeply rooted need or even the desire of humankind as a whole (even each individual separately) to give shape to things (to nature, other people, world, but to itself) – so to give an order to them. It belongs to the human as a specific creation to **"give shape", to recognize (by ideas or in reality), to bring sense**.

Within a (post)structuralist discourse, Michel Foucault introduced the term **"episteme"** very appropriately for the designation of a system or an order, social and cultural code, orientating our perception, thinking and designation of things in the direction of certain scheme, it moves within necessarily, it interprets things within, assesses a reshapes it in practice.³ In his famous book "Words and Things", he understands as an objective of his research, of his "archaeology of knowledge", the right to "reveal the epistemological field, *epistèmes*, where the knowledge, researched beyond any criterium of its rational value or objective form, confirm their

¹ ELIADE, Mircea. *Posvátné a profánní*. Praha: ČKA, 1994, p. 23.

² ELIADE, Mircea. *Posvátné a profánní*. Praha: ČKA, 1994, p. 24.

³ Pozn. na tomto místě si připomeňme i slavný Kuhnův pojem „paradigma“!

positivity...”¹ Expressed in words of Petříček, “epistémé” is “what forms the *space*” where the things seem as mutually related, referring to each other as mutually closely related or, conversely, distant – it allows us to speak and move within a harmonized world”² So, Foucault’s epistémé designates the “inner principle” of respective culture, it specifies the way of its configuration and it even forces its members to think and speak in a certain way, and not in any other one! Thanks to it, we always consider the world as something logical, uninterrupted, where our knowledge is always focusing on a harmonized world and not on a chaos.

Claude Lévi-Strauss adds concisely: “It’s because since birth, our surrounding environment forces us, in thousands of manners, if we realize that or not, a comprehensive reference system that is based on the consideration of values, motivations, centres of interest, including a reflective view on the historical existence of our civilisation that school education forces us, without which our civilisation could not be existing or it could look to us that it could not be brought into real actions. We live with this reference system and cultural reality, coming from the outside, we observe it only through a biasing image of our reference system, unless, however, it hinders us to even realize any of these facts.”³

About the term “Western rationality”

It’s important to point out, within the context of our search for requirements, the breaking point that shifted this “shaping movement” to a different platform – **formation of an antic Greek philosophy**; since these days, the guarantee of an order won’t be a “mythos” (so the “story-telling”, the story about a founding act of gods), but a “**logos**” (order of existence that could be defined by terms and that already is defined)! Naděžda Pelcová summarizes the antic characteristic of humankind precisely like this: “Man as a *zóon logon echon* is a being that was naturally adapted to listen to the world order, its harmony and not to any general sounds. ... Man as a *zóon logon echon* is the being that may listen to the order of the entirety, that is able to recognize it and express it in words.”⁴

On this basis, we may understand the antic Greek contraposition “**cosmos**” x “**chaos**”: if the universe is a certain (or shaped, meaningful) form of existence, then the opposite may be a disharmony – what was the same as non-existence for Greeks! What has an order, it’s demonstrated as all-comprising, limiting and (in its important characteristics) repeatable; or - as B. Waldenfels states – “for this all-comprising order, there is no other alternative than chaos, that is literally *nothing*, considering it from the perspective of the right order.”⁵

The expression of European (or more extensively: of Western) philosophy – starting with Antics – are always the systematic efforts for **universalism**. However,

¹ FOUCAULT, Michel. *Slová a veci*. Bratislava: Pravda, 1987, p. 49.

² PETŘÍČEK, Miroslav. *Úvod do (současné) filosofie*. Praha: Herrmann a synové, 1997, p. 29.

³ LÉVI-STRAUSS, Claude. *Rasa a dějiny*. Brno: Atlantis 1999, p. 32-33.

⁴ PELCOVÁ, Naděžda. *Vzorce lidství*. Filosofické základy pedagogické antropologie. Praha: Portál, 2010, p. 43–44 (she highlighted N. P.)

⁵ WALDENFELS, Bernhard. *Znepokojivá zkušenost cizího*. Praha: Oikúmené, 1998, p. 28 (highlighted B. W.).

the universal claim of Western philosophy may be understood differently. For us, the crucial one is the philosophical sphere, emphasized by Edmund Husserl – so as a “universality of a critical stance”.¹ The same intention is observed also in the thinking of Patočka: Patočka’s memento, addressing us with constantly increasing urgency, is – in our opinion – his summarizing idea: “Europe has shown *two ways* to open the country: *the outer way of a conquest and gaining the power over the world*, resulting in the end of Europe as a historically uniform unit; *the inner way of opening the world in a form of unlocking it*, changing the natural world at all, and evidently, this path should be found again after all the outside disasters, inner chaos and mistakes, taking it to lead us to the end.”²

Therefore, by the term “**Western rationality**” we understand certain universal spiritual claim by these days, established by the Antic Greek philosophy, overlapped markedly with the term “**theoria**” and its result is the “care for soul”. The direction of this Antic tradition, Jan Patočka calls as “care” (“**paideia**”), is the “limitation”; that means the tendency for harmonisation, for a rational (logical) limitation. Soul - as Patočka warns – “can form a solid unit from itself by care for itself, or, if it does not care about itself and avoid any “paideia”, it may reach uncertainty, non-limitation of greed and pleasure.”³

As David Krámský points out, the character of Western philosophy is, in fact, “**logocentric**” by its nature, as it expects metaphysics of speech, bound to the mind, all the time. In other words, “Western philosophy shows a privileged status of sense present (own to the existence), uncovered by words a priori – logos. The sense (arché, existence, transcendental me, property etc.) is present through the words. Western philosophy is therefore based on some non-reflected assumption that in theoria, we already speak literally about the existence of what is.”⁴

We will see that this (determining) characteristic aspect of Western philosophy is highly ambivalent; on one hand, it brought an unseen development of scientific knowledge and its technological applications, while on the other hand, it’s not incidental that the French philosopher Emmanuel Lévinas warns against the strong tendency, included in Western culture, so against the **tendency to “adapt to”, “to settle down” in any “other”**. Its world moves within the relations of certain type of “logos” where “the Same controls or absorbs or includes the Other into itself and whose model is the knowledge.”⁵

Identity and the issue of otherness

We have already expressed the belief in the introduction that no identity (collective or individual) may be formed by a one-off “act of creation” and to remain

¹ HUSSERL, Edmund. *Krize evropských věd a transcendentální fenomenologie*. Praha: Academia, 1972, p. 350.

² PATOČKA, Jan. *Evropa a doba poevropská*. Praha: Lidové noviny, 1992, p. 12 (highlighted J. P.).

³ PATOČKA, Jan. *Sókratés*. Praha: SPN, 1990, p. 72.

⁴ KRÁMSKÝ, David. *Idea multikulturality v kontextu západního (evropského) myšlení. PAIDEIA – Philosophical E - Journal of Charles University*. 1/III/2006.

⁵ LÉVINAS, Emmanuel. *Etika a nekonečno*. Praha: Oikúmené, 1994, p. 172.

like that; that means that the fundamental issue of forming the identity is the **construction of a border**.

Nevertheless, the term “border” itself should be always understood as a dynamic and controversial one: on one side, it always points to the fact making certain society (social group) unique comparing it to other society (social group), so against “those others” – in this meaning, it is of **negative** nature; however, at the same time, it also points to the fact what “keeps the society (social group) together”, what is “inside” – and within this meaning, it is of a **positive** nature. It opens as well as closes the borders, it allows as well as it limits, it slows down as well as it accelerates, confirms its content as it is, but it also makes a problem out of it; it requires observation of what is, but also it motivates to ask the question at the same time, to exceed own limits! Whatever “is given” as a separating line (regulation, law, value, standard), it’s always inner and outer at the one and same thing, as it’s like a presence of known as well as a non-presence of the anticipated.

Therefore, each border sets two principles:

- in a way that it separates, provides **identity** to the separated, legitimizes them as specifically separated entities (what’s “inside” and what’s “outside”),
- but it also mentions the separated ones (so the “inner” and the “outer”) as brought to a mutual relationship at the same time, and even to a mutual **dependence**, as one can’t be considered without another.¹

Therefore, the identity is a **process of space formation**, primarily of the **inner** one. It’s a cultivation of ideas, values, standards, stances, feelings, ways of solving problems, behaviour patterns gaining certain shape and that are typical for certain group or individual in given period of his development and activity. They are not unchangeable at all – conversely, they go over periods of births, growing, crises and falls, but they may never be stopped – that would mean an end to a group or of individual. Together with this, it means also the formation of the **outside** one – so of that what is “extra logos”, so something “extra-ordinary”), but still something that can’t be separated, only existing completely specifically, so “beyond”; B. Waldenfels speaks about the outside as about that one that acts in a paradox form of present non-presence...²

The “we” space (having its own, specific time!) is always our “spiritual house”, “**pre-understanding**”, from which we “define” ourselves for years as well as the “others”, “strange” ones. Each such “delimited” social identity must be consistent at the same time – and the consistency is not gained by an external dictate, but by the confirmation that it has its meaning, it “works”, it’s possible to understand it and provide it to own children.

However, Michel Foucault warned that, based right on this reason, each human perceives, thinks and marks the world only and solely by (already mentioned) epistemic field, i.e. that there always exists the “modus of existence of things and order, separating them, thus assuming the knowledge”, “our history” remains in

¹ Srov. NESVADBA, Petr. *Filosofie a etika*. Plzeň: Nakladatelství a vydavatelství Aleš Čeněk, 2006, p. 154-155.

² WALDENFELS, Bernhard. *Znepokojivá zkušenost cizího*. Praha: Oikúmené, 1998, p. 10.

significant portion only the “history of the Same”!¹ At this moment, the biggest **problem** (and possibly unsolvable) of “**otherness**” occurs. With regard to the fact that our thinking is always executed only within our own pre-understanding, within the horizon of its assumptions in terms, global opinion and methodological assumption, then, in fact, it’s not even possible to think absolutely within this frame, radical otherness or – as Miroslav Petříček warns – “the way we imagine the limit, does not allow us to understand the outside world in other way as in relation to the inside one.”²

Yes, we’re always in this world in certain way, we are anchored in its structures where our motives, values, objectives, our possibilities and limits come from, we **live** somehow in the world and we **understand** somehow the world; and our relations to the outside world come only from this “home”! David Krámský formulates it as follows: “Right for this existential *relation to himself*, for his egocentrism, this Me may never know adequately what would be something like the Other or what does not relate to the other being from its principle: it relates thereto only that it relates to himself through this other being.”³ Therefore, Emmanuel Lévinas often used to emphasize the principal loneliness of Me, that may not do anything else as to somehow “empower the other one” that is existentially the Other to it...

Identity as a dialogue

Previous essay was not intending to state anything else (not more or less) than the fact that we “are” always in the world in a way that we relate thereto actively, lay it down and solve it; our stay is performed by addressing the items and their interpretation. Therefore, it’s not possible to speak about the “identity formation” correctly, but about its **wakening** (establishing it), while this movement is executed **on a dialogue basis**. By entering discussion, the subject (however large social group or even the least visible individual) takes “the path”, during which it “leaves itself to be addressed” by the instructions of the world and even of himself, making an issue from something apparently “banal”, opening himself to various possibilities of solution, thus causing that such “dialogue” ends always “slightly” differently as expected before. The subject “shifts in his life efforts and search, thus gaining a critical distance that the achievement of certain “stance in the dialogue” expects necessarily!

This “**dialogue**” is the “invention” of Western type of rationality. How? We have already mentioned the tendency to look for “logos” in Antic Greece; now it’s the time to realize that the roots, the Western philosophy is based on, are two:

1. Socratic “awareness of ignorance”, the born of Socratic questions as “breaking through the natural” and an eternal distance versus the “given one”,
2. Jewish-Christian linear interpretation of temporality and the “formation of history” related thereto!

¹ Comp. FOUCAULT, Michel. *Slova a věci*. Brno: Computer Press, a. p. 2007, p. 72 a n.

² PETŘÍČEK, Miroslav. Předmluva, která nechce být návodem ke čtení. In: DERRIDA, Jacques. *Texty k dekonstrukci*. Bratislava: Archa, 1993, p. 21-22.

³ KRÁMSKÝ, David. *O povaze humanitních věd*. Liberec: Nakladatelství Bor, 2008, p. 115 (highlighted D. K.).

Socrates – using the words of Jan Patočka – forms the basis of Western model of rationality mainly on the basis that “his path is an inner renewal; however, moralistic banality does not represent an inner renewal for him, but the question: he does not look for sole success, but for the sense, and that expects the opinion of sense, understanding.”¹ Socratic dialogue method establishes the basis of traditional European “search for logos” not by the formulation of truth or even by teaching the truth; Socrates is stirring by the fact that he brings ignorance to the critical view of known reflection! Only the “awareness of ignorance” may be the root of radical questioning and also the beginning of path to real knowledge – understood and executed not as the “*techné*”, but like “*areté*”!

Ladislav Hejdánek pointed out the fact, that in the Christian world two directions of idea tradition met, very precisely: the Antic Greek and the Jewish one, not only achieving the “contact” or “syncretism,” but they opened a “dialogue” as well! “This is a phenomenon we can’t find anything similar to in mutual meeting and influencing of other cultural traditions,” Hejdánek warns.² Yes, this “dialogue” is in fact the “invention of the Western culture,” however formed on the basis of conjunction of European (Antics) influence and influence from outside of Europe (Jewish element). Dialogue stood at the beginning of forming of European identity as a collective social identity, dialogue (in its different forms – peaceful and enriching on the one hand, extremely conflicting and mutually contradicting on the other hand) was the carrying recognizing mark of Europe as a spiritual phenomenon for millennia and remains there by now – in these days even with a repetitive exigence, face to face new social and economic, political, military and ecological challenges!!

And why do we mention this “**formation of history**”? Thanks to this Antic-Jewish dialogue in the Christian world, Europe became also the “cradle” of historicity phenomenon, as the beginning of “real history could break into the world of non-historical events only under one basic prerequisite, and that’s when a man turned back to the history and faced the incoming future, but not with anxiety and fear, but in confidence and hopeful expectations. History may start only at the point, where a man did not run away from them to what lasts or what comes back all the time, but where he started to form and structure on his own by his own active involvement in the conflict between what is already and what was before and between what has not occurred yet and what is only coming.”³

Identity is of a dialogue nature, because **it’s established by posing questions and looking for answers**. Man – as already pointed out precisely by Jean-Paul Sartre – is a being by himself, not put in jeopardy of set conditions where “it” would find itself, but it forms itself by its choices and projects. “Philosophy is done in questions, it’s the art of posing the appropriate question at the right moment.” Zdeněk Kratochvíl formulates one of the axioms born in Greece adequately – and

¹ PATOČKA, Jan. *Sókratés*. Praha: SPN, 1990, p. 84 (highlighted P. N.).

² HEJDÁNEK, Ladislav. *Češi a Evropa*. Praha: Ústav pro studium totalitních režimů, 2017, p. 33.

³ HEJDÁNEK, Ladislav. *Češi a Evropa*. Praha: Ústav pro studium totalitních režimů, 2017, p. 40.

thus of the Western philosophy at all.¹ Yes, Socratic “techné maieutiké” (“the art of midwifery”) should be the axis of all activities, accompanying the “awakening” of identity. That’s not something what I may “acquire”, but it establishes itself and may establish itself only in the struggle of questions and answers! Also “paideia” – according to the old Greek concept, forming basis for us – is the “care for respective configuration of spirit.”²

Non-disposability of identity

Analogically, as the “truth,” “good” and other existentials, also identity is a phenomenon that does not exist otherwise than coming from the “dialogue”; “it belongs to the area **at the border**, averting any definite appropriation.”³ Therefore, the identity itself **resists any appropriation as it’s not an object (thing)**! This characteristic has very important consequences, as we’re encountering the efforts to attribute both, the procedure of identity creation (in particular of the collective one) as well as its results, all the time to – remember the “forming of a socialist man” and similar efforts to “implement” already prepared collective identity that will become a binding standard for each individual! Each group and each individual represent a plurality of ideas, stances, algorithms of behaviour etc. necessarily; thus, creation of their identity has sense only as a respect towards this plurality, as an entry into the “inner” and “outer” dialogue and fertile persistence there.

It’s natural that each of us wants to own something. Tendencies to “take possession” of the world, of other people and ourselves is deep-rooted, as we’re also “territorial animals” defining ourselves against anything “foreign” and trying to separate precisely “mine” (“own”) and “yours” (“not mine” “not own”). The “Mode of ownership”, Erich Fromm used to write so gracefully about, poses two serious traps for our thinking. It expects **separation** of “subject” and “object” and along with this, it expects **material (objective) nature** of both. However, by these (cartesian) prerequisites, we have technologically improved in modern era, we base our living in this world on a “looting” basis: we care not about how and how much we “are” in this world (so if we – with our cognition and acting - participate on a meaningful functioning of the world as its integral part), but about that fact what do “we have” out of this world (so what did we recognize from the outside, took possession of and utilized)!⁴

Modern era, still standing somehow “at the Descartes shoulders,” is trying hard to transform everything to items (objects), so it could take possession thereof. The expression for ownership is **monolog**. It’s an expression of belief that “I have the idea,” “I have an opinion,” “I have a relationship.” That “I am right,” “I have right” – even that “I have the god”! But isn’t it in fact different? That none of the issues mentioned could be owned, but they can be only “traced,” looked for, coming closer to them, trying hard for them? With little exaggeration, we live in an era of **prepared**

¹ KRATOCHVÍL, Zdeněk. *Výchova, zřejmost, vědomí*. Praha: Nakladatelství Herrmann a synové, 1995, p. 17.

² The same, p. 28.

³ WALDENFELS, Bernhard. *Znepokojivá zkušenost cizího*. Praha: Oikúmené, 1998, p. 9 (highlighted P. N.).

⁴ Srov. FROMM, Erich. *Mít nebo být?* Praha: Naše vojsko, 1992.

answers,” i.e. “pre-set truths” “owned” by someone and forcing us to “buy” them; in the era of simple “user manual,” at the time when our speech loses its “windows”...

Care about answers

The tendency of western philosophy for universalisation and ownership can't be changed from one day to another. It can be only **doubted** all the time. How? By a systematic cultivation of **questioning**. In relation to the process analysis of searching for “Selbst” as a root of human identity, Anna Hogen warns concisely: “It's necessary to awaken the identity all the time, not to implant it! How? Very easily. By questions, forming of space where nobody is going to have the feeling that his existential question is inappropriate, unwanted, inconsumable, suspicious, dumb.”¹

The question is so great by the fact that it breaks through the closure of monologue explanation, directing to something what has not been said by now, what does not exist by now – what is (as a paradox) present in its non-presence. The question is an expression of taking a path, as it **calls for life at the border, life in problematicness**. It's an incursion of “otherness” into an immovable, given condition of issue. B. Waldenfels writes well: “The question is an event distinguished by its own stubbornness. In spite of the notice, it does not make any claim for truthfulness and it's not connected to any other events of speeches so it could be proven or that anything could be derived thereof. ... Questioning makes cracks in large spheres of validity...”²

Martin Heidegger held the opinion that it's exactly our human “standing in the world” that give us the “key for being,” i.e. the possibility to understand the world in whole. The ownest attribute of human existence as a “stay” (“Dasein”) is the questioning (posing questions, perception of the world not as a “mark of exclamation” – so as some file of prepared responses, but as a “question mark,” as a problem). In the questioning mind, crucial change of the term “**world**” occurs: now it does not look like only a pure mechanical “complex of things”, but more like a horizon of relations where the things may be found, from where they “come” to us and “address” us. Heidegger emphasized: “In the truth, as an existence rooted in freedom, there is the exposition into un-hidden-ness of existence as it is. Existence of a historical man, not yet understood and even without the need of existentially determined formation, starts at the moment, when the first thinker stands against the un-hidden-ness of existence with the question, what is this existence. In this question, there's the un-hidden-ness firstly incorporated.”³

The question is the effusion of our mankind as the entire human standing in the world is of dialogical nature – humankind does not exist in any other way as permanently entering the dialogue with the world, other people and with itself. In his days, Karl Jaspers stated that man is the only being in the world that poses questions. And Martin Buber was tirelessly explaining in all of his works that “Me” never exists isolated in the world, all alone; it's either “Me” understanding the world

¹ HOGENOVÁ, Anna. Fenomén identity jako problém. In: *PAIDEIA – Philosophical e-Journal of Charles University*. číslo/Ročník/Rok: 1/III/2006 - Winter 2006 – monothematic issue on Multiculturalism.

² WALDENFELS, Bernhard. *Znepokojivá zkušenost cizího*. Praha: Oikúmené, 1998, p. 54.

³ HEIDEGGER, Martin. *O Pravdě a Bytí*. Praha: Mladá fronta, 1993, p. 39-41.

as an object (what is “Me” anchored in the due “Me – It”), or it’s the understanding “Me” that is anchored in the relationship “Me – You”.

Yes, questioning enriches, opens new challenges. **Questioning disables the ownership as it’s not possible to own the confines naturally!** But here, the great challenge for a Western man lies as each questioning **brings doubts at the same time**. Martin Buber warns: “Whoever says “you,” misses any “something,” has nothing. But he finds himself in a relationship.”¹ Therefore, life in questions does not lead to “ownership” of truth, love, good, beauty, nor identity, but it’s a life that has a deep sense, as it’s a life searching, life striving, life not only between those others, but with them and for them...

Objective is to create an “interstice”

David Krámský, when summarizing the prerequisites of the approach to understanding of the “other” writes down concisely: “Not in an adopting cognition, in the knowledge of Others, but only in our own response to the Others as to those who are mainly strangers to us, forms what is between us, a space arises that tends to be marked as a space of intersubjectivity, space where common sense arises, where common speech, dialogue occurs.”² The fertile path of forming a group identity is not the transformation of “other” to the “same” in fact (universalisation, homogenisation), nor the search for some “joint minimum,” “intersection of sets,” and not even the ignorance, parallelism, pure tolerance and “bearing of the other.” What is important, is to find consensus for reasoned, materially argued, socially accepted and executed search and creation of those “space between,” joint space for intersection. If we don’t perceive “polis” as a “projection screen” of individual and group interests, but as a **space for joint social constitution of meaningfulness of social phenomena**, this looks like the only possibility for the **creation of intersections** between individual subjective views, and therefore for the understanding of the point of view of a second person! If we don’t accede to the creation of an authentic, natural “public space,” there’s a threat that the chasm between the individual and society will deepen, individual and group frustrations and tensions will become more frequent, “alienation” and “depersonalisation” of existing policy will be experienced more sensitively and the threat of that **“banalisation” of society** will increase markedly, what thinkers like Hannah Arendtová, Alexandr Solženicyn, Václav Havel or Václav Bělohradský already warned about number of years ago...³

Right this **“otherness,”** offered to us within daily procedures of globalized world, should be understood by us as a **space for encountering**, as a “hiddenness”, from where – as Heidegger stated – “events come” to us. The “otherness” is a challenge not for its “abolishment”, not “un-hidden-ness” and subsequent manipulation for purpose, but it’s more of an opportunity to weight its own references and to look for the levels of their interpretation (and also of our own self-interpretation). In our opinion, the words of Tomáš Halík fit here, albeit they were originally designed only

¹ BUBER, Martin. *Já a Ty*. Praha: Votobia, 1996, p. 8.

² KRÁMSKÝ, David. *O povaze humanitních věd*. Liberec: Nakladatelství Bor, 2008, p. 139 (highlighted D. K.)

³ Srov. NESVADBA, Petr. *Filosofie a etika*. Plzeň: Nakladatelství a vydavatelství Aleš Čeněk, 2006, p. 287-288.

for the Bible interpretation; their broader meaning is, hopefully, clear: “Sure: Bible alone is a collection of texts of different genres, texts that communicate often with each other and one interprets another.”¹ But isn't it like that in case of people encountering other people? Perhaps, it does not include (not even assumes) understanding, the ability of mutual interpretation, adopting opinion of the other? And isn't such “opinion adoption” an “entry into the story of another one”?

Such “entry into story” assumes wide **humility** for sure, but it's as scare as frog's teeth in the Euroamerican civilisation. Therefore, Emmanuel Lévinas for example has already warned couple of years ago against a false self-confidence of Western rationality, against a “hypertrophied collective Ego of the West,” feeding itself by false belief for centuries that it “owns the world.” According to Lévinas, it's completely different: “Foreignness of the other, that's his freedom! Only free beings may be foreign to each other. Freedom that is “joint” to them, is exactly the point what divides them.”²

We may prove the real value and dignity of its concept to humankind not by its “release to the world” as the only right and valid “receipt,” but – apparently as paradox – by the fact that we can doubt critically its claim for the absolute. Doubt understood in this way mean a critical distance against own solution, so an expression of a free, non-dogmatic philosophy in fact, posing questions and respecting the fact that it defines itself always against the same, freely existing, Other being.

Conclusion

Previous article could not set its objective to “solve” the problem of social identity formation, and not even the problem of “identity panic” of the West. It wants to be a humble contribution to the discussion about the actual condition of our cultural and civilizational self-recognition, as without a deep and sincere self-knowledge, there may be no solution. We believe that this **reflection of a Western pre-cognition** should not be understood and grown not as a self-satisfactory “insight into a social mirror,” not as a political or cultural “self-torture”; It should be specific and meaningful, it should start with the comeback to own philosophical basis of Western rationality and then, it must be – in dialogue – open and (in good) doubted, relativized, “open” face-to-face to the Other. It's not a dishonour to our prerequisites and traditions; it's “only” a doubt about absolute validity of home as a world horizon, about its meaningful deconstruction. This methodical and conscious disengagement from our own self-knowledge is not – paradoxically – a loss, but an **enrichment**; because this is the only way the path opens to wide assessment of home as a place to settle down.

If we want to leave the threatening “vicious circle,” when the formation of group social identities is understood as a self-satisfactory self-knowledge of our own acting, solidified by values an emotionally by unchanged defensive stances, it's of utmost importance to set the tendency of critical reflection, analysis, assessment of prerequisites of our life, our freedom – and so our responsibility as well in education

¹ HALÍK, Tomáš. *Co je bez chvění, není pevné*. Praha: Nakladatelství Lidové noviny, 2002, p. 115.

² LÉVINAS, Emmanuel. *Totalita a nekonečno*. Praha: Oikúmené, 1997, p. 58.

and in the public area at all! Tomáš Halík judges optimistically: “We’re not ‘objective,’ I add – we’re always ‘biased’ as it’s given by our nature of final, created beings. To consider ourselves as ‘objective’ would be only another option of being naive and of the dangerous ‘pretending to be god.’ Our worldview is determined by the place, where we stay. However, we’re able to move back a little from us, abandon our claims for full knowledge. We are always stuck in our ‘pre-recognitions,’ however, we may review them and go over them in an accommodating confrontation with the others.”¹

As an extremely fertile, the **hermeneutic solution** seems to be the most appropriate for the analysis of identity phenomenon, accenting the ontological dimensions of human stay, specifically in the work of Martin Heidegger, who emphasizes the fundamental roots of man in the “Dasein” structure and the interest for understanding of its sense derived thereof; right this **understanding** “is the way how we focus on our own existence; we relate to our existence in a way that we understand it somehow and we are as we understand it.”²

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¹ HALÍK, Tomáš. *Co je bez chvění, není pevné*. Praha: Nakladatelství Lidové noviny, 2002, p. 119.

² ČAPEK, Jakub. Martin Heidegger a nárok filosofické hermeneutiky. In: *POKORNÝ, Petr a kol. Hermeneutika jako teorie porozumění*. Praha: Vyšehrad, 2005, p. 308.

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RESUMÉ

Text je pojat jako výchozí teoreticko-metodologická úvaha řešení vědeckovýzkumného úkolu „Sociálně rizikové skupiny a rizikové chování“. Autoři koncipují fenomén kolektivní identity nikoli jako cosi statického a jednou provždy daného, nýbrž jako proces sebevymezení určité sociální skupiny, tedy jako dynamické kladení a překračování jejích hranic a tvorbu smyslu. Upozorňují na důležitost reflektovat filosofické kořeny západního typu racionality, založené v nároku „logos“ a „paideia“. Sókratovský přístup k analýze formování identity jim umožňuje chápat ji jako neustávající kladení otázek a prolamování „samozřejmého“. Na tomto základě pak formulují autoři i svou tezi o dialogickém charakteru identity a o její principiální nepřisvojitelnosti a nezczitelnosti. Text vybízí ke konstituování kritického myšlení, jež je původní intencí řeckých kořenů západní civilizace a jež se bude vyznačovat péčí o otázky, tvorbou skutečného veřejného prostoru a reflexí předpokladů vlastní vztaženosti.

Klíčová slova: Dialog, identita, otázky, racionalita, tvar, západní myšlení, univerzalismus.

S U M M A R Y

This text should be understood as the basic theoretical and methodological consideration of solution within a scientific and research task “Social risk groups and risk behaviour.” The authors conceive the collective identity phenomenon not as something static and given once for all, but as a procedure of self-definition of certain social group, so as a dynamic posing and crossing of its borders and formation of sense. I warn about the importance of reflecting the philosophical roots of the Western type of rationality, based in the claim of “logos” and “paideia.” Socratic approach to the analysis of identity formation allows them to understand it as a persistent posing of questions and breaking through the “natural one.” On this basis then, the authors define also their thesis about a dialogical nature of identity and its principal non-adoption and non-alienation. This text motivates to the constitution of critical thinking that is the original intention of Greek roots of Western civilization and that will be significant by its care about the questions, formation of a real public space and reflection of prerequisites of own relation.

Keywords: Dialogue, identity, questions, rationality, shape, Western philosophy, universalism.