Mariola Kuszyk-Bytniewska

Deficits of Political Culture in the Context of Changes in Postmodern Subjectivity

History knows many periods of dark times
in which the public realm has been obscured
and the world become so dubious
that people have ceased to ask any more of politics
than that it show due consideration
for their vital interests and personal liberty.
Such times can be rightly called (after Brecht) 'dark'.[1]
Hannah Arendt

Introduction

Hannah Arendt wrote about the world and the times in which she and the characters she portrayed lived in her collection of essays entitled *Men in Dark Times*. According to her, it was 'the world during the first half of

Mariola Kuszyk-Bytniewska, PhD (ORCID: 0000-0001-6835-054X) – a habilitated doctor, graduate of philosophy and sociology, author of the book entitled *Działanie wobec rzeczywistości. Projekt onto-epistemologii społecznej* [Taking Action towards Reality. Blueprints of a Social Onto-Epistemology] (2015). She works at the Institute of Philosophy of the Maria Curie--Skłodowska University in Lublin (Department of Aesthetics and Philosophy of Culture). Her research interests include: social onto-epistemology, philosophy of culture, philosophy of social sciences and recently also philosophy of politics and philosophy of education. Contact: mkuszyk@umcs.pl.

1   Quoted after German edition: H. Arendt, *Von der Menschlichkeit in finsteren Zeiten. Rede über Lessing*, München: R. Piper & Co. Verlag, 1960, p. 19.

the twentieth century with its political catastrophes, its moral disasters, and its astonishing development of the arts and sciences.'[2] Our dark times are times in which our sense of community and citizenship, as well as politics in a broad sense, is experiencing a deep crisis on a global scale, accompanied by equally amazing developments in science and technology. The public space is appropriated to a large extent by politics narrowed down to the temporary domination of some groups over others, achieved by means as perishable as the goals they serve. A wave of dissatisfaction and dislike for the elite is spreading around the world, and previously unknown antagonisms are multiplying. This process is accompanied by denivelation and the loss of cohesion of political culture – the phenomena of the post/late/modern[3] mass rebellion.

In this context, the question about the ontic foundations of political culture seems to be important.[4] I understand these foundations as the relationship between the political sphere of human activities, culture (to the extent that it can take on the role of a regulator of these activities) and subjectivity in its historical shape. The ontic foundations of political culture are therefore the sphere of implementing in the indicated relationships (of politics, culture and the subject): what may be deemed necessary or possible in terms of action; what, due to the subject, may be a factor in its transformation or duration in identity; what may have the value of a regulatory factor in culture, in its broadest sense, due to its relation to political action, and the creative or motivational function towards the subject. It should therefore be emphasised that each of the abovementioned spheres of human activity separately goes far beyond the characteristics determined by the above relationships. Culture may play completely different roles than those that make it an important

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2   H. Arendt, *Men in Dark Times*, San Diego – New York – London: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 1970, p. vii.

3   'Late modernity', 'postmodernity', 'liquid modernity' and even 'second modernity' are various terms for the phenomenon of the radicalisation of modernity, coined in the second half of the twentieth century by Anthony Giddens, Zygmunt Bauman and Ulrich Beck. In this article, I mainly use the first and second terms.

4   See K. Przybyszewski, *Kultura publiczna. Refleksje wokół kondycji społeczeństwa i państwa polskiego*, Poznań: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Instytutu Filozofii Uniwersytetu Adama Mickiewicza, 2013.

component of political activity; a historically shaped subject may define its identity differently than that which is created or guided by political motivation, and political action may even significantly exceed culturally conditioned patterns of action.

Political culture is the main medium of the dynamics of these relations.[5] This is due – as I assume here – to a general feature of culture, namely that it is the domain of objects of both instrumental and symbolic meaning. Thus, political culture is a society's symbolic resource that provides subjects with patterns regulating their activity. Wherever and to what extent the regulatory functions performed by the patterns of politically causative actions may prove to be insufficiently effective – due to the conditions of consensus that these actions and their goals require – political culture provides the means for their interpretation.[6] It is in the condition of political culture that changes – in which order or disorder, the functioning or dysfunctions, and the stability or unsteadiness of social relations, in which the political character is reproduced, are implemented – are reflected in the most expressive and directly accessible way to the consciousness of the participants of social processes. It often happens that a historically determined form of subjectivity comes into conflict with the forms of power that dominate in society, and then political culture, serving as a mediator, reveals the nature of the 'subject-politics' relationship and provides the means for its symbolic transformation.

When looking at the meaning of political culture in this way, one should adopt theoretically different points of view from those which narrow the view to the scope of politics itself. One needs a broader perspective, a view from a distance or even from a place that does not belong directly to the political sphere. This place is subjectivity in its relations with political culture from a perspective that distances us, contemporary participants

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5   In this article, I neither adopt nor discuss classical concepts of political culture. I am more interested in how culture – in its broad sense – regulates (strengthens or weakens) the activities of subjects in the public sphere and how it influences the participants' understanding of themselves (subjectivity/identity).

6   The opposition and, at the same time, complementation of the patterns of causative and regulative behaviour is a proposal for a functional understanding of culture formulated by Marcin Czerwiński. See M. Czerwiński, *Kultura i jej badanie*, Wrocław: Ossolineum, 1985.

in social life, from the sphere of politics in two ways – historically and also intellectually: historically, when we refer to the formation of political culture from the past; intellectually, when we use conceptual means that allow an 'intellectual traverse' between the past and the present for analysis.

To achieve this effect, I reach to Hannah Arendt's texts for inspiration. In *The Human Condition*, she refers to ancient times in order to describe, from the distance created by historical perspective, the conditions enabling subjects (of broadly understood action) to participate in a community (*polis*) and thus in the public sphere. Self-care – a category of political culture so different from the one that is in force today – was, in her analyses, the essence of the political, the basis of responsibility for *polis*, already noticed by the ancients.[7] What has changed in the form of the subjectivity of human beings since ancient times, and how have these changes transformed the political sphere? How has the political sphere changed subjectivity? How does the political culture we know and perceive as our own become anachronistic, deficit-laden, and therefore relative when compared to the realities of the political orders of antiquity?

With the order of ancient political culture as a constant point of reference, Arendt writes about transformations in relation to property, household and privacy, which in modern times enters the public sphere and becomes part of the social sphere, leading to a crisis of the human condition in dark times. I am interested in what has changed in late modernity in relation to (classical, Enlightenment) modernity, deepening the crisis of dark times – noticed and deliberated by Arendt – and preventing us from learning a sufficient and instructive lesson from twentieth-century

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7   I realise that Arendt's approach is quite one-sided as it ignores the fact that democracy in ancient Greece (but this is probably true for democracy in all times) came at a price. The political question is always who pays the price for this good. We find the answer relating to ancient times in the famous formula 'I am happy that I was not born a barbarian, woman or slave'. This saying, known in ancient Greece, is the answer to this question. For more on this, see, for example, S. Benhabib, *How to Read Hannah Arendt's The Human Condition (1958)?*, Legal Research, http://blogs.law.columbia.edu/critique1313/seyla-benhabib-how-to-read-hannah-arendts-the-human-condition-1958/ (accessed: September 2020). See also M. Bobako, 'Seyla Benhabib versus Judith Butler: spór o podmiot i emancypację (wersja feministyczna)', *Principia* 2005, No. XLI–XLII (2005), pp. 212–231.

totalitarianisms. The area of my research is postmodern subjectivity and its entanglements with political culture.

Subjectivity, the political and culture: modern and postmodern formations

Modernity[8] promoted such subjective values as authenticity and self--realisation, theoretically assuming and practically popularising the possibility of regaining oneself, sovereignty based on the moral and cognitive prerogatives of the subject, in the social world. Therefore, modernity – as a cultural formation – was to a large extent a contestation of attachment to the past in its political and cultural dimensions, as well as in the promoted models of subjectivity. Jean-Jacques Rousseau was the initiator of the modern recontextualisation of analyses of subjectivity. His way of problematising subjectivity instigated the discourse of authenticity using previously unknown concepts: *sentiment de l'existence*, alienation, individuality, self-transparency of existence and an obstacle to self--realisation.[9] Acceptance of the assumptions of such a discourse and its numerous mutations occurred in the anthropology of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in completely different, and often unconscious, forms. Karl Marx, Sigmund Freud, Edmund Husserl, Jean-Paul Sartre, Hans-Georg Gadamer and Willard Van Orman Quine dealt with modern aporias of subjectivity, revalorising and reformulating the earlier thought.[10] Of course, they did this from different perspectives, ascribing powers of various types to the subject and differently problematising the importance of self-knowledge for its existence. A common element in this area of modern thought is the dualist perspective of problematising the condition

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8   What I mean here is a cultural formation related – in Max Weber's terms – to the process of progressive (thanks to the development and cooperation of science and technology) rationalisation of everyday life leading to the 'disenchantment of the world' – which was expressed and implemented in the Enlightenment, and its beginnings have been observed since early modern times, dating from the early seventeenth century.

9   See J.J. Rousseau, *Reveries of the Solitary Walker*, London: Penguin Books, 1979; J. Starobinski, *Jean Jacques Rousseau. Transparency and Obstruction*, trans. A. Goldhammer, with an Introduction by R.J. Morrissey, Chicago – London: The University of Chicago Press, 1988.

10   See P. Pieniążek, 'Podmiot (w) nowoczesności', *Forum Oświatowe,* 2008, special issue, p. 40.

of the subject.[11] The intellectual and ethical exposure of various forms of this dualism has been the driving force behind modern anthropology.

Late modernity has already introduced us to a different discourse, moving the problem of the constantly discovered crisis of subjectivity beyond Rousseau's tradition. Late modernity problematises the time of crisis of the value of authenticity and its derivatives differently, and is largely critical of modernity and its anthropology. Hence, the new questions of researchers – most often sociologists and philosophers – are addressed to postmodernity: Who/what becomes the subject of *praxis* when authenticity is no longer available or ceases to be considered valuable? (Charles Taylor); Who/what becomes the acting subject when they cannot be themselves not because the social environment blocks the ability to shape their 'self', but because subjectivity grows so strongly with social disembedding that – paradoxically – it is the basis for the practices of its formation? (Anthony Giddens); What is the relationship between power understood as a factor of oppression and the power of the self, that is, the ability to transgress the conditions of being oneself? (Michel Foucault).

Noticing the erosion of the ethos of modernity, Taylor indicates the sphere of politics as the deepest source area of the crisis of subjectivity.[12] Giddens sees the crisis forms of transformations in late-modern society, in which the forces of symbolic culture, destructive to subjectivity, are involved, creating 'disembedding mechanisms'.[13] 'Abstract systems', that is, all kinds of symbolic and institutional social tools: 'symbolic tokens' (the media of exchange having a symbolically standard value, such as money) and 'expert systems' (creating useful, practically specialised knowledge, not necessarily scientific, primarily concerning everyday life) contribute to the loss of control over the mechanisms stabilising subjectivity itself.

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11 'Modernity is, above all, the experience of a dualism that divides its reality, tears the unity of man and their world, which results in the loss of the expected fullness and harmony of existence, and therefore the possibility of fulfilment ("there is no fulfilment in the world" – says Jaspers)'. *Ibidem*, p. 41.

12 See Ch. Taylor, *The Ethics of Authenticity*, Cambridge, MA – London: Harvard University Press, 1992, pp. 1–12.

13 A. Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991, pp. 14–21.

They conquer not only the relationship of late-modern man with nature, devaluing the vital meaning of what seemed – to the still modern thinker, Edmund Husserl – to be the foundation of the subject's relationship with the world – *Lebenswelt*. They even intervene deep into the human body, thus changing the previously known ways of handling it. 'Psychotherapy, meditation, yoga and bio-feedback techniques', says Giddens, are systems that compensate for the risk of life, but at the cost of ontological security based on the stability of relationships with the social environment and self-relationship.[14] Foucault not only rejects modern interpretations of the human condition, expressed using terms such as 'authenticity', 'alienation' and so on, but he also vivisects the foundations of modern anthropology. According to him, 'death' or 'the ends of man' is the end of the modern discourse of anthropology, which includes dualisms that allow for the creation of man's modern self-knowledge in anthropology in terms of the crisis of 'European humanity', 'drama of existence', 'alienation of the species-essence of human beings' and similar concepts. He ascribes subjectivity, under the conditions of genealogy or hermeneutics of the self, the historical dimension of becoming, the active moment of creation, already noticed on the side of social forces (genealogy) and on the side of the subject's activity (hermeneutics of the self).

Therefore, we can presume that while modernity destroyed the traditional type of social ties,[15] and consequently made traditional forms of shaping subjectivity obsolete, postmodernity destroys the modern type of social ties and the shape of the subjectivity embedded in them. Therefore, it is worth looking at how and why, and into what, modern subjectivity is transformed when political culture is the result and, at the same time, the area of these transformations. Who/what is the subject of action under the conditions of the crisis of the ethos of authenticity, disembedding and the lack of 'ontological security', that is, under the conditions of the crisis of the modern form of the subject's autonomy? How do the conditions of postmodern intersubjectivity change?

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14 *Ibidem*, pp. 137–143.

15 I mean the bonds characteristic of traditional communities, societies, which are based on kinship, neighbourhood, friendship, similar ways and conditions of life. Émile Durkheim calls them 'mechanical solidarity'.

Similarly, radical changes take place in the contemporary awareness of what the political sphere is. I mean the two significant shifts in how to problematise the field of political phenomena. Firstly, it is the problem of power understood as an area of constituting a subject at the expense of interest in state institutions and forms of exercising power. Power relations are understood in a way that makes their effects be perceived as constitutive of subjectivity (Foucault)[16] or, on the contrary, the condition for the possibility of political existence is perceived in dysfunctional forms of subjectivity (Gilles Deleuze, Félix Guattari).[17] The other shift arises from the criticism of the 'post-political' nature of the alleged – in terms of the adherents of agonistics – disappearance of political conflicts in 'postmodern' society. Here, the consensual vision of the importance of a political moment in social realities gives way to the vision of a political society, the understanding of which enhances the significance of a conflict for the functioning of democratic institutions.[18]

Postmodernity also requires new problematisations of cultural phenomena. I perceive them primarily in two areas. The first is the

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16   See M. Foucault, *Power/Knowledge. Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972–1977*, ed. C. Gordon, trans. C. Gordon et al., New York: Pantheon Books, 1981; M. Foucault, *The Politics of Truth*, ed. S. Lotringer, trans. L. Hochroth, C. Porter, Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2007.

17   'We maintain that the social field is immediately invested by desire, that it is the historically determined product of desire, and that libido has no need of any mediation or sublimation, any psychic operation, any transformation, in order to invade and invest the productive forces and the relations of production. *There is only desire and the social, and nothing else.* Even the most repressive and the most deadly forms of social reproduction are produced by desire within the organization that is the consequence of such production under various conditions that we must analyze. That is why the fundamental problem of political philosophy is still precisely the one that Spinoza saw so clearly, and that Wilhelm Reich rediscovered: "Why do men fight *for* their servitude as stubbornly as though it were their salvation?". G. Deleuze, F. Guattari, *Anti-Edipus. Capitalism and Schzophrenia* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press 2000, p. 29.

18   As Chantal Mouffe says: 'It is my contention that envisaging the aim of democratic politics in terms of consensus and reconciliation is not only conceptually mistaken, it is also fraught with political dangers. The aspiration to a world where the we/they discrimination would have been overcome is based on flawed premises and those who share such a vision are bound to miss the real task facing democratic politics.' Ch. Mouffe, *On the Political*, London – New York: Routledge, 2005 (*Introduction*). See also: P. Dybel, S. Wróbel, *Granice polityczności. Od polityki emancypacji do polityki życia*, Warszawa: Fundacja Aletheia, 2008, pp. 123–127; F. Biały, 'Konflikt jako wartość? Demokracja agonistyczna jako wartość a populizm europejski w ujęciu Chantal Mouffe', *Reflksje* 2010, No. 1, pp. 219–233.

radicalisation of the inclusion of contingency in symbolic culture. The general name for this intellectual movement that appreciates contingency as a constitutive property of culture is 'deconstruction' which was proposed by Jacques Derrida. With regard to cultural phenomena, it means interpretative procedures that bring out casualness and, consequently, the essential 'indecisiveness' of meanings as a constitutive feature of these phenomena. Contingency then becomes a general term for the condition of postmodern symbolic culture.[19] Another concept that transforms the modern understanding of culture and dominates the analyses of postmodern culture is 'intertextuality', which is a form of questioning the hierarchical order of texts of culture as its model order.[20] Both these concepts appreciate this moment of the analysis of cultural phenomena which makes it possible to understand them as systems of symbolic phenomena, ordered and capable of modelling human communicative behaviour, but also creating unpredictable, surprising or even exploding systems of meanings.[21]

How to recognise and define the postmodern deficits of political culture embedded in the above--outlined changes in the sphere of subjectivity, politics and culture? I consider this to be the most important question from the perspective of the analysis of contemporary relations between subjectivity and the political sphere. When looking for answers to this question, I refer to the following authors: Charles Taylor (who characterises the crisis of the ethos of authenticity), Anthony Giddens (who analyses the process of eradicating 'the self' in late modernity) and Michel Foucault (who describes contemporary techniques/technologies of the self).

Such references, however, require an indication of the background to highlight my analysis. This background is the approach to politics that

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19 See R. Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989.

20 See J. Kristeva, *Σημειωτική. Recherches pour une sémanalyse*, Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1969; R. Nycz, 'Intertekstualność i jej zakresy: teksty, gatunki, światy', *Pamiętnik Literacki*, 1990, No. 81/2, pp. 95–116; M. Głowiński, 'O intertekstualności', *Pamiętnik Literacki*, 1986, No. 77/4, pp. 75–100.

21 See J. Lotman, *Culture and Explosion,* Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2009.

relates it to the Greek (in the spirit of Aristotle and his contemporaries) understanding of *praxis*. Based on this understanding of politics, I indicate the framework of political culture as a field regulating social activities, in which self-understanding is also shaped.

Politics as *praxis*

In the sense that appears in the famous definition of man as *zoon politikon* (πολιτικὸν ζῷον), 'politics'[22] is equal to action, human activity, *praxis* (πρᾶξις), which the ancients contrasted not only with *episteme* (ἐπιστήμη), knowledge sanctioned by cognitive norms, but also with *techne* (τέχνη), the skills and knowledge of doing something according to rules. *Praxis* is therefore a field of human activity, the meaning of which comes down to education, improving human efficiency, as long as it relates to the subjects themselves and has no material results. *Praxis* was therefore a method of working out the efficiency of communing with oneself and other fellow citizens wherever there was at least a minimum level of consensus. The sphere of 'politics', as a fundamental part of *praxis*, therefore belonged to *polis* and only within its boundaries did it acquire its proper meaning. This consensual limitation of politics as belonging to *praxis* was an essential part of the ancient way of understanding it. *Praxis* always remained within the limits of *polis* and found its means and ends in it. Namely, any strategic action, aimed at confronting an opponent, a non-local, a foreign one, already belonged to the art of war, that is, to *techne*, just like *rhetoric* (ῥητορικὴ τέχνη). Politics and ethics – in the modern sense – would fall within the scope of *praxis* without being separated or even juxtaposed, within a uniform framework of what belongs to *polis* as a community social being.

The meaning of 'politics' has undergone significant modifications since modern times. First of all, it is located in the area of *techne* (skills, arts), as a technology of power and governance. It is also radically separated

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22   Much has been written (in theories of politics and in public debate) about the multitude of meanings of the concepts of politics and the political. See e.g. K. Minkler, 'Główne problemy konceptualizacji pojęcia polityczności', *Studia Politologiczne*, 2015, No. 37, pp. 50–74.

from ethics. This is primarily fostered by the systematic blurring of the boundaries between *techne* and *praxis* and between *techne* and *episteme*. The shift in the understanding of politics, grounded in these changes, is best seen by Niccolò Machiavelli. Power, its technology and indicating the means of achieving, maintaining or maximising it thus becomes the main goal and task, and also the subject of political discourse. Thence, the agonistic nature of politics has been exposed, considered basic and – it seems – sanctioned theoretically against the intentions of ancient thought. This grounded reflection on politics is complemented by a modern perspective on the already known 'ills' of politics: the impermanence of results, ineffectiveness of measures and changeability of goals. Modernity makes us problematise all human activity in its finite dimension, which, in relation to politics, allows us to ask about its limits and therefore also about what may limit it from the outside and make it more susceptible to rational consensus and terminologisation from the theoretical perspective.[23]

The disappearance – in modern times – of the consensual vision of the political, which was developed in antiquity in the terms *praxis* and *polis*, opens the way for the already modern involvement of the notion of culture in the descriptions and explanations of the political. The concept of 'political culture' grows out of the modern way of thinking about politics, which calls for its limitation as a function of rationalisation in the sphere of action. Under conditions where the presumed consensus of *praxis* is no longer the elementary basis for understanding the political, rationalisation enables political consensus. In this way, the change in the model of

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23 Jürgen Habermas, who understands modernity as an unfinished project, constructs the notion of communicative reason as a category conditioning the contemporary, consensual understanding of the political. The social order that allows for the launch of discourse as a way of negotiating the conditions of the political boundaries of this order is based on three types of claims that rationalise the conditions of political discourse, consensually limit the sphere of politics in the sphere of values and, at the same time, create conditions for recreating modern understanding and self-understanding of subjectivity. Claims for truth, rightness and honesty as *a priori* conditions of communicative action are therefore – according to Habermas – the foundations of what is understood here as political culture and from which one can derive analytical categories of its understanding. See J. Habermas, *Erläuterungen zum Begriff des kommunikativen Handelns*, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1984. See also P. Dybel, S. Wróbel, *Granice...*, pp. 437–524.

thinking about politics also opens the way to a conceptual, theoretical way of problematising it in accordance with the modern requirements of the scientific approach to social phenomena.

What can limit politics from the outside as a factor of its rationalisation? Political culture is the key concept in answering this modern question. Namely, political culture is credited with the ability to regulate politics from outside, that is, with the use of cultural means, also developed and functioning outside the sphere of politics. The meaning of the concept of political culture and the importance of its role in relation to politics will change depending on how close or far away we are from the holistic understanding of politics encompassing the entire human *praxis*.

There are many concepts for these relationships. I find Arendt's concept interesting primarily because the author systematically refers the notion of the political to subjectivity, and fills the human condition with the content of political culture. Arendt understands politics very broadly as action in the sense of Aristotelian *praxis*, as action between subjects (intersubjective). In *Men in Dark Times*, she writes:

> […] the world and the people who inhabit it are not the same. The world lies between people, and this 'in-between'– much more than (as is often thought) men or even man – is today the object of the greatest concern and the most obvious upheaval in almost all the countries of the globe. Even where the world is still halfway in order, or is kept halfway in order, the public realm has lost the power of illumination which was originally part of its very nature.[24]

The human condition, as understood by Arendt, does not come down to human nature. Rather, it is a set of existential conditions, human life on earth, such as the ability to be born, mortality and worldliness. They are also forms of human activity: *vita activa* (work, production and action) and *vita contemplativa* (thinking, will and judging), as well as areas of human activity: the public sphere (thanks to which a person becomes equal and free with respect to others) and the private sphere (everything that is necessary for life, that is, primarily work).[25] Of the three

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24   H. Arendt, *On Humanity in Dark Times: Thoughts about Lessing*, in: *eadem*, *Men in Dark Times…*, p. 4.

25   See H. Arendt, *The Human Condition*, Chicago – London: University of Chicago Press, 1998, pp. 7–21.

forms of human activity that make up *vita activa*, the most important is action understood as action *sensu stricto*, which is, for example, politics. Actions take place directly between people, in a community of citizens understood as a shared space of interactions not mediated by things or matter, as an intersubjective field. Work and production are related to the necessities of life, to the need for the utility of produced things. On the other hand, freedom from the necessities of life occurs in action. Only in the public sphere can man achieve real freedom, equality and justice: through free action (politics) and speech (human speech). The human condition is therefore the condition of man as a political being and it is therefore constantly threatened by both its own instability and by the appropriation of the public sphere by the private sphere, and then by the social sphere. This is about an 'autonomous and authentically human way of life', which could be implemented in *polis*, which – according to Arendt – the Greeks understood as 'a very special and freely chosen form of political organization and by no means just any form of action necessary to keep men together in an orderly fashion.'[26] So, not in every *polis*, but only in one where there was no despotic, total or terrorist rule. The point is that *vita activa* referred to political life in the dimension of action. 'Action alone is the exclusive prerogative of man.'[27] Action and only action implies being together. Intersubjectivity is as much a constitutional moment of the political as of subjectivity itself. This is where – in Arendt's understanding – the necessary link between subjectivity and politics is established. This is an important moment in Arendt's thought because it shows that i n t e r s u b j e c t i v i t y i s a s m u c h a c o n d i t i o n o f t h e political as of subjectivity.

Political culture is a space in which human actions taking place in the common sphere (in the public sphere) are regulated and, therefore, it is also a space in which subjectivity is defined as long as it is a condition for relations with others in this common sphere. Knowledge, particularly specialised knowledge and, above all, science, is an important element of these regulations in postmodernity.

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26   *Ibidem*, p. 13.

27   *Ibidem,* p. 22.

Knowledge and identity of the (weak) subject: deficits of political culture in late modernity

I start discussing these issues with Charles Taylor's concept, which seems most immersed in modernity among the three that locate the 'knowledge--subject' relationship in the environment of postmodern society. In his analyses, Taylor uses a conceptual apparatus that arises from the approval of the fundamental ideas of modernity. He particularly prefers those in which he sees a formative character in relation to subjectivity. The basic anthropological premise of his argument is the conviction that human life is impossible without strong evaluation, without fundamental moral orientation. What constitutes the subject is precisely their attitude to the sources of strong evaluation and the spirituality built on it. 'But we are only selves insofar as we move in a certain space of questions, as we seek and find an orientation to the good.'[28] Taylor is an advocate of the old thesis that the sources of subjectivity are moral. These sources were God, Nature, Cosmos and so on, and in modernity they are in the subject itself. This is where Taylor enters into a dialogue with modernity.[29]

The one who articulated this understanding of the foundations of modern subjectivity was – according to Taylor – Jean-Jacques Rousseau, who 'even gives a name to the intimate contact with oneself, more fundamental than any moral view, that is a source of such joy and contentment: *le sentiment de l'existence*.'[30] The basis of strong moral evaluation is therefore a structure that can be derived from both the Socratic tradition of understanding the source of morality as a specific sensitivity to the voice coming from within the isolated self and from the moral version of Cartesian *cogito*. Taylor also attributes another idea to Rousseau that is a novelty in understanding the foundations of modern identity and calls this concept 'self-determining freedom': 'It is the idea that I am free when I decide for myself what concerns me, rather than

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28 Ch. Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001, p. 34.

29 See M. Meijer, *Charles Taylor's Doctrine of Strong Evaluation: Ethics and Ontology in a Scientific Age*, London – New York: Rowman & Littlefield International, 2018.

30 Ch. Taylor, *The Ethics of Authenticity…*, p. 27.

being shaped by external influences... Self-determining freedom demands that I break the hold of all such external impositions, and decide for myself alone.' [31] Rousseau affirms the moral being of the subject in the peculiar self-turning capacity which the subject owes to the Cartesian transparency of consciousness reflecting itself as *cogito* and the consequent ability to remove all kinds of obstacles in order to maintain the identity of being and the self.[32] Being faithful to oneself becomes a measure of self-acceptance in moral self-affirmation and the will to be oneself, and nothing more or nothing less, becomes a test of the permanence of the reference to the source of morality. Rousseau's belonging to oneself is the closeness of the self to the source – the unique and thus the most valuable form of being the subject. Maintaining this closeness guarantees this specific way of being, which is authenticity.

Being a defender of subjectivity understood in this way, Taylor notes threats to the spirituality of contemporary man in what founds and, at the same time, deforms it, that is, in hypertrophic forms of modern ethos. He perceives excess and threat in individualism (in the form of extreme subjectivism and narcissism) and in the primacy of instrumental reason. However, he uses different means than Rousseau to criticise this state of affairs. He introduces into the discourse of authenticity the conditions of culture which are themselves subject to criticism as regards their reference to the modern order of values. At this point, the determinants of political culture are also included in the discourse of authenticity.

The hypertrophy of the modern ethos is grounded in social atomism and the primacy of instrumental reason, which, in late modernity, enters the social sphere and also, thanks to the growing rationalisation of life, leads to the instrumentalisation of the 'self'. The consequence is the loss of freedom by the subject under conditions where self-knowledge,

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31   *Ibidem*, p. 27.

32   More than one hundred years after Rousseau's death, James Joyce expressed it somewhat differently, but equally emphatically, through the words of Stephen Dedalus: 'I will not serve that in which I no longer believe, whether it calls itself my home, my fatherland, or my church: and I will try to express myself in some mode of life or art as freely as I can and as wholly as I can, using for my defence the only arms I allow myself to use – silence, exile and cunning.' J. Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* and *Dubliners*, New York: Barnes & Noble Classics, 2004, p. 219.

understood as the ability to orientate oneself in the social environment, is acquired without participating in this environment. All this becomes possible thanks to the dramatic and reflective structure of subjectivity in which self-control competes with self-delusion. In Taylor's opinion, the type of understanding and practising authenticity that destroys the moral tissue of the subject shapes self-realisation against the values associated with social life. He argues that one can authentically be true to oneself and authentically belong to oneself only when one approves the horizons of the meaning of who we are. Thus, we are different and we may want to recognise ourselves as being different from others, but it is not the diversity that is the source of value here, but a certain horizon of significance which makes us accept this diversity in relation to ourselves and others. There is something in the moral plan that unites those who are different and that makes them respect that difference. And it is not only the belief in the principle of equality, it is the foundation/source that makes this belief possible – shared values and a commonly recognised horizon of meaning. In other words, one can belong to oneself only insofar as there is a common basis for determining what the good available to a person living in a community is. One can belong to oneself and be true to oneself only when they are a member of the community.

Therefore, according to Taylor, an essential source of modern identity is the affirmation of ordinary life, in the social space of recognising and being recognised, regulated by authenticity.[33] The affirmation of ordinary life and, at the same time, its instrumentalisation are two important phenomena that shape the identity of modern subjectivity. When in the secularised culture of the modern world the eschatological perspective disappears from the area of ordinary life, it is subjected to the pressure of the modern pace of change – its spiritual integrity disintegrates. It can be subordinated to forces external to it without any special obstacles, losing its original power. In this way, new spaces for new phenomena are created in the sphere of public life. Masses and phenomena such as mass culture

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33   The concept of affirmation of ordinary life is a technical term in Charles Taylor's philosophy. He uses it in his various writings, but he most broadly develops his concepts focusing on this term in his book *Sources of the Self…*.

enter the political scene. Masses – as the subject and object of political action – are united by forces whose vector is opposite to that which integrates ordinary life. Mass culture is a process and, at the same time, a result of the instrumentalisation of the spiritual values of ordinary life. As a consequence, it also creates the possibility of constantly recreating the dominance of this culture and its strength. Its strength lies in the occasional character of meanings, the ephemeral character of values and the elimination of truth in its non-cognitive sense, that is, understood as a value to which the subject of action defined by their relation to the community can refer, from the common world.

How can we define the area of deficits in political culture from the perspective of Taylor's reconstructions of the sources of modern subjectivity? Taylor writes about it bluntly: 'The first fear is about what we might call a loss of meaning, the fading of moral horizons. The second concerns the eclipse of ends in face of rampant instrumental reason. And the third is about a loss of freedom.'[34]

Social atomism, the culture of narcissism as a degraded form of authenticity, and the spread of instrumentalism that also affects subjectivity itself lead to a loss of freedom and what Taylor refers to as a 'fragmented society'. The consequence of the fragmented society is the lack of common goals, which deprives individuals – emancipated from social bonds – of reference to the source of morality. Thus, the culture of authenticity becomes falsified. Common horizons of meanings lose the coherence and status of the moral frame of reference for thinking and acting. The disappearance of moral horizons is a consequence of 'the hold of moral subjectivism'. Its formula is the directive to choose a moral attitude not because it is or seems to be right, but because it is convenient and in line with immediate interests. Relativism as an attitude that obscures the sense of authenticity is, in fact, suicidal to practices of moral evaluation, yet, at the same time, unavoidable in the situation of 'fractured horizons'. The affirmation of the very possibility of choosing obscures the meaning of what we choose and ultimately paves the way for instrumental rationality.

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34   Ch. Taylor, *The Ethics of Authenticity*..., p. 10.

Another form of overgrowth and, at the same time, degradation of the culture of authenticity leads to the loss of liberty:

> [...] what we are in danger of losing is political control over our destiny, something we could exercise in common as citizens. This is what Tocqueville called 'political liberty'. What is threatened here is our dignity as citizens. The impersonal mechanisms mentioned above may reduce our degree of freedom as a society, but the loss of political liberty would mean that even the choices left would no longer be made by ourselves as citizens, but by irresponsible tutelary power.[35]

Taylor sees the negative side of the affirmation of modernity – and what he defines as its source form – in threats or, as he calls them, malaises.[36] He notices them in the environment of already p o s t m o d e r n o r d i n a r y l i f e. He understands them primarily as the result of two processes running through the culture of the late twentieth century and giving it an original face but, at the same time, posing a threat to the form of subjectivity within this constituted culture. Firstly, it is a process of the secularisation of culture. As a result, modern people lose the foundations of strong evaluation within the realm of ordinary life. Secondly, it is the process of adapting the content of symbolic culture to the needs of mass communication technology. This calls into question the ability of this culture to consensually regulate *praxis*. When subjected to the pressure of technological innovation (media), symbolic systems, codes of this culture, lose their quality as a common and self-understood means of communication. Namely, these systems sometimes wear out faster than the texts they produce, thus making illegibility the inherent feature of the semiosphere. The process of symbolic culture succumbing to the needs of technology, as a process of the instrumentalisation of the sphere of meanings, enters the area of subjectivity in postmodernity. Ordinary life is emptied of productive activity in the sphere of symbolic culture wherever it is replaced by mass production technology. Here, the subjectivity of the creator of culture gives way to the processes of adaptation to the forms and content of mass media.

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35   *Ibidem*, p. 10.
36   See *ibidem*, pp. 1–12.

The postmodern world of ordinary life has lost its essential values necessary for maintaining complex relations of intersubjectivity. It is no longer a world that is considered ready, extant, and which is universally shared, common, and thus supports human *praxis*. A culture so determined is therefore a culture incapable of forming a strong identity. What kind of subjectivity fits these conditions?

The subjectivity of human beings, shaped under such conditions of culture, is characterised by a deficit in two ontic areas of the foundations of ordinary life. First of all, it is a d e f i c i t o f a c o m m o n h o r i z o n o f m e a n i n g s, which is a permanent frame of reference for communication. Communication practices lose the ability to shape the subjectivity of their participants. This type of culture, which shapes narcissistic and instrumental attitudes towards one's self, can be called a culture of 'weak intersubjectivity'. I understand it as a culture that provides subjects with the means to interpret the social environment that, at the same time, weaken the ability of strong evaluation within the horizon of meanings characterised by temporariness and instrumentalism. Thus, subjects are incapable of joint action in the public sphere and do not assimilate influences essential for their identities from this sphere.

It is also a culture that deprives the subjects of action of the sense of the reality of the objective ordinary life environment. The deficit in the sense of reality of the objective side of ordinary life is a subtle, though extremely influential, shift in the sphere of experiencing everyday life. It is determined by the ways in which things are experienced through the methods of production that are imposed on subjectivity:

> The claim is that the solid, lasting, often expressive objects that served us in the past are being set aside for the quick, shoddy, replaceable commodities with which we now surround ourselves. Albert Borgman speaks of the 'device paradigm', whereby we withdraw more and more from 'manifold engagement' with our environment and instead request and get products designed to deliver some circumscribed benefit. He contrasts what is involved in heating our homes, with the contemporary central heating furnace, with what this same function entailed in pioneer times, when the whole family had to be involved in cutting and stacking the wood and feeding the stove or fireplace. Hannah Arendt focused on the more and more ephemeral quality of modern objects of use and argued that 'the reality and reliability of the human world rest primarily on the fact that we are surrounded by things more permanent

than the activity by which they are produced.' This permanence comes under threat in a world of modern commodities.[37]

Therefore, if strong valuation is a feature of a strong subject, then the subjectivity of late modernity is weak as it functions in areas of deficits. Paradoxically, the affirmation of ordinary postmodern life weakens subjectivity in two ways: it weakens the intersubjective value of action and the reality of the objective environment. This entails producing subjects unable to resist and take the initiative, beset with fear of influence and unable to self-transform in the reduced areas of intersubjectivity.

'"The self" becomes a reflective project'[38] – A n t h o n y G i d d e n s describes the postmodern premise of subjectivity in this concise way. To develop this thesis, it is necessary to understand modern knowledge as the initiator of changes in subjectivity. This is because it is specialised knowledge (especially as a science), grounded institutionally and professionally, and based on trust in 'abstract systems' that retain cognitive validity and effectiveness in various theoretical and practical contexts. Reflexivity is the basic feature influencing the way in which late-modern subjectivity is constituted. Reflexivity designed for action completely changes the human *praxis.*

The designing tools are provided by modern abstract social systems that can be used under conditions defined by a high degree of variability and uncertainty of the results of action.[39] In this respect, semantic changes in the colloquial and scientific use of the term 'experience' are significant. They make it possible to detach from the meaning of this term everything that is only an allusion to the subjective conditions of its content rooted in the time and locality of the subject in favour of the universal qualities of the cognitive content of experience. From now on, duration – so important in calculating the trajectory of life – belongs only to knowledge

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37   *Ibidem*, pp. 6–7.
38   A. Giddens, *Modernity…*, p. 32.
39   See M. Jacyno, *'Wszystkie globalne problemy zaczynają się na twoim talerzu.' Doświadczenie w warunkach globalizacji*, in: *eadem*, A. Jawłowska, M. Kempny (eds.), *Kultura w czasach globalizacji*, Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Instytutu Filozofii i Socjologii PAN, 2004, pp. 105–119; U. Beck, *Risk Society: Towards a New Modernity*, London: Sage Publications, 1992.

objectified in science and expert systems. The projection of actions for the future is burdened with modern uncertainty and the constant experience of breaking ties with the past. The coherence of one's own experience with socially objectified knowledge is maintained fragmentarily and only through reflective confrontation and mediation between objectified knowledge (technoscience) and experienced knowledge (lifeworld). The identity of human individuals thus ceases to be embedded in communities and their traditions – it is created through the autobiographical narrative:

> Modernity, it might be said, breaks down the protective framework of the small community and of tradition, replacing these with much larger, impersonal organisations. The individual feels bereft and alone in a world in which she or he lacks the psychological supports and sense of security provided by more traditional settings. Therapy offers someone to turn to, a secular version of the confessional [...]. Therapy is not simply a means of coping with novel anxieties, but an expression of the reflectivity of the self – a phenomenon which, on the level of the individual, like the broader institutions of late modernity, balances opportunity and potential catastrophe in equal measure.[40]

Postmodern identity – as opposed to traditional identity – increasingly detaches itself from collective identities. 'Reflexivity can be defined as a self-defining process that depends upon the monitoring of, and reflection upon, information about possible trajectories of life.'[41] Secondly, it also means something that 'reflexivity stretches beyond the personal realm, deeply rooted as it is in institutional social life.' – these are expert reflective systems.[42]

Under the conditions of late modernity, due to such systems, direct relations and contexts of actions become less significant for shaping subjectivity, and those which are general and indirect, in both social (*praxis*) and technological (*techne*) senses, gain in importance. They have the nature of mechanisms which disembed an individual from the systems and dependencies in which subjectivity, the full capacity to create one's own life in an accepted and sort of self-understanding environment, was

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40   A. Giddens, *Modernity…*, pp. 33–34.
41   A. Elliott, *Concepts of the Self*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 2020, no pagination.
42   *Ibidem*, no pagination.

achieved in premodern and modern times. The most important of these are 'symbolic tokens' and 'expert systems' which Giddens collectively calls 'abstract systems.'[43] Symbolic systems, such as money, not only ensure the exchange of goods, but also connect different contexts of activity, distant areas of life, thanks to their abstract and standard value. Expert systems, on the other hand, detach the activities of subjects from their experience and participation, because they are based on knowledge that neither experts nor potential clients using it have created or checked. The process of its production and validation is beyond them. A dietitian, financial adviser, coach, therapist and fitness trainer are people who are trusted more when their necessity is motivated by breaking the community roots of participation and experience. Thus, abstract systems provide a relative sense of security, based on the authoritativeness of knowledge and trust in those who represent but do not create it. Nevertheless, these systems '[…] deskill – not only in the workplace, but in all the sectors of social life that they touch. The deskilling of day-to-day life is an alienating and fragmenting phenomenon so far as the self is concerned.'[44]

Giddens believes that this undermining of the foundations of premodern subjectivity-forming mechanisms leads to a loss of ontological security. Conditions imposed on subjects by abstract systems lead to a constant revision of the existing knowledge about the world. Thus, in conjunction with the devaluated ability to assess the value of knowledge, this process creates existential anxiety and the need to trust someone (experts). Ontological security is always related to non-discursive 'practical consciousness', which can be interpreted here as the consciousness that recreates the routine of everyday life.

The reflexivity of social systems, their detachment from tradition and the tendency to design innovative frames of reference for participants in social life also establish a different model of attitude to the temporal ordering of social processes. It takes the form of the 'colonisation of the future' understood not only as a detachment from tradition, but also as a necessity for establishing prospective models of time control:

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43   A. Giddens, *Modernity…*, p. 18.
44   *Ibidem*, p. 137.

> The 'openness' of things to come expresses the malleability of the social world and the capability of human beings to shape the physical settings of our existence. While the future is recognised to be intrinsically unknowable, and as it is increasingly severed from the past, that future becomes a new terrain – a territory of counterfactual possibility. Once thus established, that terrain lends itself to colonial invasion through counterfactual thought and risk calculation. [The calculation] of risk, as I have mentioned previously, can never be fully complete, since even in relatively confined risk environments there are always unintended and unforeseen outcomes.[45]

The postmodern man does not receive 'hard' means of controlling their life from their social environment. They must rely primarily on creating themselves, which is partly forced by the reflexivity of the social environment, and partly results from the need to colonise the future. The frames of reference in which the subject-creating factors play an important role constantly change and, therefore, man must be their own 'reflective project' and create their 'narrative biography'.

So, what deficits of political culture can be extracted from the background of Giddens' concept? I believe there are three basic 'postmodern coefficients' of political culture.

The first is the 'unstability of political beliefs and decisions' determined by their burden with a degree of uncertainty that undermines the significance of premises derived from the past for the choices made. Individual experiences, as well as experts' opinions, are quickly devalued due to new experiences and the constantly changing opinions of experts.

The second factor is the abandonment of confidence in evaluating political participation with reference to everyday life in favour of abstract systems. As a consequence, everyday life is separated from politics. The specificity of the impact of these systems lies in the fact that the influence they exert on cultural attitudes takes place without knowledge of their functioning,[46] and often despite community experiences. Their abstractness is, on the one hand, a factor of asymmetry in the knowledge

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45   *Ibidem*, pp. 111–112.

46   Pierre Bourdieu speaks much more on this topic in: P. Bourdieu, *On Television,* Cambridge: Polity Press, 2011.

of the subjects of the political game, and, on the other, the anchoring of decisions in the environment of the 'fiction of the future'.

The third factor is the form of perception of public life that is based on the re-evaluation of threats resulting from the uncertainty of the future as the basis of community life. This phenomenon is accompanied by the 'sequestration of experience', which ignores the importance of events in the lives of individuals that are unpredictable from the perspective of the colonisation of the future.

The history of subjectivity, or rather various histories of subjectivity, is the general theme of Michel Foucault's works. Perhaps this is the most radical philosophical project written from within the horizon of modern thought, since the invention of this epoch, *ego cogito*, *fundamentum inconcussum* and the subject of representation – the most unhistorical of the unhistorical inventions of this epoch – is included in history as its subject. Although in the first period of Foucault's activity the subject disappears 'like a face drawn in sand at the edge of the sea'[47] (as an object of humanities – archaeology), it appears later: first in its form distinguished by power (a genealogy showing the 'ontology of ourselves') and then in a hermeneutic form (hermeneutics of the subject as a description of techniques for becoming oneself).

After the event which Foucault refers to as the 'Cartesian moment',[48] which involved the separation of the philosophy of knowledge (understood as the philosophy of cognitive reference of the subject) and spirituality (understood as all transformations of the being of the subject that occur through work on oneself and thus owing to 'self-care'), 'the self as a reflective project' becomes the only feasible model of modern 'self'. In this Cartesian moment – according to Foucault – the history of subjectivity enters into modernity. It is an epoch in which the reflexivity of the subject establishes their self-creative abilities, but also allows them to perceive the complex dimensions of the subjective ontic indeterminacy ('empirical--transcendental doublet'), submission to historical forces (historical

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47   M. Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences,* New York: Routledge, 2002, p. 422.

48   See M. Foucault, *Hermeneutics of the Subject*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016, p. 14.

ontology of the self), non-self-knowledge and separation from the norms of culture (history of sexuality). All these perspectives are combined by the question about the ways of constituting subjectivity – a question that goes far beyond the horizon set by Descartes' *Meditations*.

According to Michel Foucault, the participation of knowledge in the structure of subjectivity – as its history written in the traditions of Western culture teaches – lies in the fact that one cannot be oneself without knowing anything about oneself. Constructing oneself as an object of knowledge, for oneself and for others, is a privileged point of view for understanding the relationship between subjectivity and knowledge, which in various variants – archaeology, genealogy, problematisation – is an analytical form of thematising the issue.[49] One cannot constitute oneself without the participation of self-knowledge – this is the Cartesian *residuum* of Foucault's genealogies. In his *Technologies of the Self*, he writes:

> Max Weber posed the question: If one wants to behave rationally and regulate one's action according to true principles, what part of one's self should one renounce? What is the ascetic price of reason? To what kind of asceticism should one submit? I posed the opposite question: How have certain kinds of interdictions required the price of certain kinds of knowledge about oneself? What must one know about oneself in order to be willing to renounce anything? What do you need to know about yourself in order to agree to renounce something?[50]

So, Foucault asks what one needs to know about oneself today when one is oneself and what one needs to forget, what knowledge one needs to sacrifice to be oneself today? How do prohibitions and worked ignorance become a source of reflexivity?

The inversion of the Weberian question shows the difference between modern and late-modern problematisations of the relationship between knowledge and subjectivity. In Max Weber's view, reason is an instance constituting subjectivity that requires asceticism. This need is motivated by the irrational nature of the forces blocking the causative power, constitutive of the subjectivity, which this reason may have at its disposal.

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49   See M. Foucault, *Subjectivity and Truth*, in: *idem, The Politics…*, p. 151.
50   M. Foucault, *Technologies of the Self: A Seminar with Michel Foucault*, Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1988, p. 17.

Foucault believes the opposite – it is a certain type of asceticism, a certain type of discipline that requires reason, a certain form of intelligibility to play the role that constitutes the subject. Instead of following how reason incarnates in subjectivity and thus creates its modern, rational form, it is necessary to notice how discipline, subject-creating rigour shapes rationality, sets its limits and defines the fields of activity. Subjectivity, therefore, does not need liberation of the reason in order to realise itself in the fullness expected by Rousseau, it does not have to disembed the irrational, alienating forces from the reality of its existence, as Karl Marx expected. Quite the contrary, it is some historical form of subjective formation that is transmitted and shaped by the subject-creative power of this finite, 'inauthentic' reason.

From this perspective, modern categories that describe the ways subjectivity exists – such as authenticity, emancipation and alienation – obscure the relationship between subjectivity and knowledge rather than describe it. Hermeneutics of the subject (self), understood as 'self-care' practices in which human beings actively define their status of subjects, complement the genealogical point of view on the historical forms of the constitution of subjectivity. In the late twentieth century, man functions in a cultural environment in which they can become someone other than they were, when they care for themselves, when they perform 'critical practices of the self', when they can 'think in a new way' (*penser autrement*) and implements various kinds of 'technologies of the self' (*techniques de soi*), aestheticise their life and take a transgressive attitude, thanks to which they can 'self-realise'.[51]

In the postmodern transfiguration of this culture, we observe a significant shift in emphasis. As Foucault states:

> There has been an inversion between the hierarchy of the two principles of antiquity, 'Take care of yourself' and 'Know thyself'. In Greco-Roman culture knowledge of oneself appeared as the consequence of taking care of yourself. In the modern world, knowledge of oneself constitutes the fundamental principle.[52]

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51   See M. Kwiek, *Dylematy tożsamości. Wokół autowizerunku w powojennej myśli francuskiej*, Poznań: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Instytutu Filozofii Uniwersytetu Adama Mickiewicza, 1999, p. 284.

52   M. Foucault, *Technologies of the Self…*, p. 22.

In postmodern culture, this principle evolves into what may be called the postmodern paradox of the cultural functions of the Cartesian moment: the technology which was a way of dealing with the resistance of matter has been transferred to spirituality, where it does not play roles known from antiquity. In antiquity, technologies of the self were productive, in the way that 'artisanal' activities related to each other, today they are industrial methods of producing the self.[53]

How, then, to understand the postmodern deficits of political culture in the context of the ontology of the self and the hermeneutics of the subject?

Firstly, attention must be paid to the ambivalence of the meaning of the 'technologies of the self' due to their possible references to postmodern political realities. On the one hand, it is easy to see that socially and technologically objectified thought is replicated and reproduced much more effectively and faster than critical thought resulting from reflective self-reference.[54] However, the reflective nature of the latter is not a sufficient guarantee of the effectiveness of the criticism (effectiveness in both intellectual and social sense). Today, self-concern not only has its critical forms and does not escape expert systems, but also, on the contrary, relies heavily on them. The technologies of the self are now more effective than the practices of critically constituting subjectivity. It happens – fairly frequently – that these are not individual, but even industrial ways of creating identity. Criticisms, as products of spirituality, are intellectual and sometimes existential adventures, and although they are sometimes very creative, they are not very effective on a social scale. The technologies – although they are the results of creative thinking – are not themselves creative, and they derive their efficiency from expert-scientific prestige, from routine. The ancient technologies of the self, exemplary for Foucault, functioned differently than they do today. Their contemporary characters are dominated by expert culture and, as such, they are an expression of the deficit of subjectivity rather than its fulfilment. They are an expression of a spirituality deficit. Late modernity has fundamentally re-evaluated

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53   See, e.g., works by Bryan S. Turner.
54   See M. Foucault, *What is Critique?*, in: *idem*, *The Politics...*, pp. 41–81.

the technological ramifications of the Cartesian moment. The ancient and modern technologies of the self differ in what could be called the political background of *praxis*. Its ancient understanding, limiting the scope of the influence of *praxis* to *polis*, assumed the tacit condition of a minimum social consensus as a condition of the possibility of *praxis* itself. In this sense, politics as part of *praxis* was practised only within the limits of *polis*, and each war ended it. Politics is an intersubjective activity in the sense that only its 'own' members can be its constituent subjects. Therefore, in order to be able to pursue politics, one must pre-reflexively consider others as 'co-practitioners'. By crossing the boundaries of *polis* or the boundaries of the intersubjective order of social life, we depart from this perspective, thus entering the sphere of *techne* achievements. The modern background of the subject's political nature is already dominated by its agonistic understanding and necessarily transforms politics as *praxis* into politics as *techne*. The significance of this transformation boils down to the difference between activity that engages the powers of subjects actively participating in the consensual creation of social order, in which everyone can find themselves, and the production of subjects susceptible to technological efforts taken by the authorities.

Secondly, the question needs to be asked again: what is the share of knowledge in being oneself today? The modern version of the Cartesian moment divided the knowledge of man into self-knowledge and objective knowledge. In late modernity, however, this division has been blurred by the technologies of the self. As technologies, they belong to the field of objective knowledge, as technologies of the self, they shape self-knowledge. The historical and cultural significance of the Cartesian moment therefore lies in the fact that the ancient forms of culture of the self (as Foucault calls it) can no longer be maintained under postmodern conditions and can only be a point of reference for a critique of their contemporary forms. They can only function under cultural conditions where striving for subjective autonomy is an element of the political game. The genealogy and hermeneutics of subjectivity must then be considered together – as practices in which self-management cannot be fulfilled without being managed by others, the possessors of objective knowledge.

Conclusions

We therefore recognise and experience the postmodern significance of political culture through participation in knowledge-forming processes that previously remained outside the areas of social practice and are important for the constitution of subjectivity. The importance of these processes is ambivalent. On the one hand, they produce new forms of reflexivity, which are the basis for the self-creative possibilities of the subject, and on the other, they are new forms of culture based on deficits in the ability to regulate political action and shape subjectivity.

On the one hand, these processes affect the social functioning of scientific knowledge and its participation in the wider phenomenon of the crisis of trust[55] accompanying the awareness of the increased risk of 'being oneself', in the face of both the possibilities of technologies allowing for radical interference in the human body and the social consequences of globalisation processes.[56] Thus, knowledge, and particularly scientific knowledge, participates in the process of disembedding individuals from identity relations still functioning in modern society. Authenticity – as a constitutive value for modern subjectivity – in the face of postmodern forms of risk and the variety of being oneself ceases to be a non--controversial value, just as the identity strategies of disalienation lose their importance.

On the other hand, in postmodernity, expert knowledge takes on a new meaning. It becomes an – already intellectually and socially specialised – identity and subject-forming factor. In the face of the ongoing disembedding process, it is expert knowledge that creates essential frames of reference and tools for shaping subjectivity. From the point of view of premodern and modern social and cultural systems, we are dealing with a paradox – because here knowledge is an identity factor and, at the same time, it eradicates an individual.[57]

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55 See P. Sztompka, *Zaufanie. Fundament społeczeństwa*, Kraków: Wydawnictwo Znak, 2007.

56 See U. Beck, *Power in the Global Age: A New Global Political Economy,* Cambridge: Polity Press, 2005.

57 The ambivalence of postmodern social systems is discussed, among others, by Małgorzata Jacyno in *'Wszystkie globalne problemy...'.*

In late modernity, then, we deal with a peculiar way of obtaining identity and with its new contents and the new values used to build it. In both aspects of this issue, the decisive role is determined by what might be called 'the main axis of tension in contemporary self-knowledge'. This tension is triggered by the incompatibility of the two types of knowledge about man. The first type is the knowledge that arises, is processed and eventually fades away along with the accumulated individual experience gained through participation in social practices. Lifeworld (*Lebenswelt*) is a term coined by phenomenology for the environment of knowledge understood in this way. On the other hand, there is technologically, institutionally and professionally objectified knowledge (which does not mean objective!) – this is scientific knowledge. It differs from the previous type in terms of the dynamics of its changeability as well as the forms of duration, the breadth and strength of its impact on everyday life, but also the ability to quickly obsolete its content in response to a systematic narrowing of the social circle of competent recipients. The share of this formed – postmodern – knowledge will constantly grow and diversify in cultural resources as long as social deficits are generated, triggering the need to compensate for them. The discrepancy between the types of knowledge (traditional – premodern, the knowledge of the *Lebenswelt*, expert knowledge, the knowledge spontaneously arising in the internet circulation and so on) becomes a drama as long as their joint, though antagonistic or independent, functioning is necessary to be a subject.[58] Their contents and ways of acquiring them create a system diversified in terms of origin, structure and functioning, as well as their diversified subject-forming potential and unequal compensation potential in the face of deficits of subjectivity.

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58   It is worth noting that it is twentieth-century philosophy that should be credited with recognising this drama. See e.g. E. Husserl, *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology,* Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1970.

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Deficits of Political Culture in the Context of Changes in Postmodern Subjectivity

The author addresses the issues of the transformation of subjectivity in the face of changes in the political and cultural status of knowledge in postmodernity. She tries to identify and define the postmodern deficits of political culture as a consequence of these changes. Looking at the links between subjectivity and politics, she reaches out to Charles Taylor, who characterises the crisis of the ethos of authenticity, Anthony Giddens, who analyses the process of disembedding a subject, and Michel Foucault who describes modern technologies of self-creation in the context of a concept of politics understood as *praxis* by Hannah Arendt.