Freedom, Responsibility, Nation, Ethos and Tradition in the Context of the Social Construction of Reality and Its Ontological Consequences
Pavel Kvaltýn

Abstract

Central terms of conference are discussed in the context of the social constructivism. On the grounds of this Berger and Luckmann's concept are derived some fundamental ontological and gnoseological consequencies: from the thesis of social construction of reality follow implications about social ontocreativity of everything that is perceivable for man. On this basis is then discussed mythology of nation and collective identity and illusiveness of traditional idea of freedom. At the end is proposed the way how we can sustain the idea of responsibility and what it means in the context of social constructivism or social ontocreativity.

Text

In this contribution we will address the key terms of this conference: freedom, responsibility, nation, ethos and tradition: from the perspective of the theory of social construction of reality and some fundamental ontological consequences. Firstly, we will look at the basic parameters of this model, then we will suggest ontological and gnoseological results of such thesis and at the end, we will sumarize, what these outcomes permit us to speak about selected key terms.

Social construction of reality, formulated by Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann,[1] can be seen as the bible of contemporary social constructivism, whose influences are obvious in science of today, not just in humanistic studies. Their study develops theoretical tradition of sociology of knowledge, thus of quite interdisciplinary field. In short, their model is a specific summarization and elaboration of the line of thinking, based in thesis of Marx, Nietzsche, Dilthey, Durkheim, Weber, Gehlen, Plessner, Mead, Scheler, Mannheim and especially phenomenology and its development in the works of Alfred Schutz.

Starting precondition of this concept is the anthropological thesis that defines instinctive infacility of a man. By the time when the man is born his instinctual equipment is insufficient. From the perspective of ontogenesis, embryonal period of human organism still endures for almost a whole year after the birth. Important stages of evolution, which are in the case of other animals finished inside of the mother's body, are, in the case of human, completed only after the birth. In that time the child is inside not just a physical, but also a social world. Child forms a lot of various relationships and attitudes. Process of becoming man is set in the mutual relationship with environment, both natural and human. Ontogenesis of man and his perception/interpretation of the world/reality/society is socially predetermined. By the moment of birth the evolution of human organism is permanently subjected to social determined influence.

Whole mechanism of the construction of reality is derived from this starting proposition: every human activity is subjected to habitualization and this habitualization always arises in the social environment, generally in relationshipness. Any periodically repeated activity stabilizes itself in a pattern that can be imitated without any noticeable effort. Thus, the habitualization has the

[1] BERGER, P.L., LUCKMANN, T.: *Sociální konstrukce reality*. Brno: CDK 1999.

essential psychological advantage: reduction of choices and options, liberation of individual from the burden of all of other alternatives to every single activity, then guiding of originally unguided instinctual human facilities, creation of stabilized background, release of energy for another deciding, thinking, re-thinking and improvement. Now, after the habitualization, from now on, it is not necessary to define again every single situation on every occasion and in every encounter, step by step. Most various situations can be incorporated into prearranged definitions and we can also anticipate or project a lot of activities. Thus the habitualization is the base for any form of later institutionalization.

Institutionalization is created when habitualized activities are mutually typified by certain executors of these activities. Every single typification is an institution – institution performs typification. So, the institution declares that activity of the type X is executed by the actors of the type Y. The institutions have their history, they direct human behaviour, their primary social control is guaranteed by the simple fact of their existence. Institutionalization equals to the subordination of the social control.

Due to transgenerational transfer these institutions assume objectivity, solidity, substantiality. Quite new born institutions (e.g. of my parents) are now considered as completely independent objects, existing without dependency on the actual individuals, who are their actual historical embodiment. Then institutions create whole symbolic universes as a set of beliefs „everybody knows" that aim at making the institutionalized structure plausible for the individual. The symbolic universe „puts everything in its right place". It provides explanations for why we do things the way we do. Proverbs, moral maxims, mythology, theology, philosophy, science and other systems of ideas and values are part of the symbolic universe. And they are all (more or less sophisticated) ways to legitimize established institutions.

Thus, all of a sudden, social world is created as an all-inclusive and fixed reality, reality of the same ontological level as the reality of nature.

Whole concept is such as this dialectical model postulates: man creates society – society creates man. In relational interactions man (not as an indivual, but the man "in interaction", man as an relationship) creates institutions, externalizes itself. Institution in this sense is every canalized, stabilized pattern of behaviour, action, opinion, knowledge and consciousness. These externalizations subsequently acquire character/level of objectivity. They harden and become real as any other form of being. At last, through socialization and education, man internalizes these externalized-objectivized institutions and symbolic universes, takes them as granted, as his own, valid and he follows them. In this process of institutionalization de facto everything is created. Including science, religion, categories of language, notions of cognition and terms and ideas of everyday practical life.

Now, let us look at postulated ontological consequencies and hypothesis of ontocreativity as the determining attribute of sociability. So-called social onticity is in a certain way quite pleonastic. Of course, sociality or sociability has to have some form of being, facticity of the existence of "social" on everydayness level is evident and necessary. The interesting part of the onticity of social is in its ontocreational dispositon. What it means? On the grounds of Berger/Luckmann's concept we can postulate, that intersubjectivity or sociability per se disposes of ontical creativity, sociability itself provides the construction of being of all levels and orders. In this sense, such a creation is not just re-construction of yet existing forms of being, of some natural primordiality, on the contrary, this is qualitatively and ontologically new creation, not just reconstructing but creative ontocreativity.

Why it should be like that? Can we support this hypothesis on the thesis of Berger/Luckmann's concept? Construction in Berger/Luckmann's sense is synonymous with Dilthey's idea of Aufbau. Central is the focus of the model, situated in the reality of everydayness, so – into the fundamental level that creates proto-knowledges and proto-consciousness. Embedding of this topic in the most primary of possible levels intensifies its ontocreational character: social construction of reality does not take place in some specialized levels by some selected experts through some secret or scholarly procedures. By the definiton, everyone participates in the process of social construction of reality, in every single form of action and behaviour, in every encounter, with any of its externalizations and interpretations of its environment. Both objective-externalized reality and subjective-internalized reality are altogether reality participated by everyone, constitued by everyone and constituting everyone.

In this way, essential is interconnection of Gehlen/Plessner's thesis with phenomenologically shaped concept of intersubjectivity. Human excentricity, instinctual deficiency, construction of institutions as a tool of survival, intersubjective nature of human existence from the moment of birth, these are the attributes that epitomize the space of life word – Lebenswelt, of the reality of everydayness, as the environment that is always and necessarily socially defined and delimited. There is no exit, no possible way of escape from this setting. The man is forced to participate on the construction of reality and on the ontocreativity of sociability, into which it is firmly and unrevokably embedded by the simple fact of its birth. So, participative ontocreativity is imposed on us, it is an essential part of our habitus or our biologically determined configuration.

Theory of institutionalization specifies the particular ways and patterns of this ontical creativity. Externalization illuminates how exactly is man ontocreative through the sociability, theory of institutions tells us what are the factual products of this activity. When we recall the exact definition of institution: that it is every canalized/stabilized form of activity, behaviour, knowledge and consciousness, then is obvious that the goal of human intersubjective ontocreativity is in point of fact everything. This relates to comprehension of language as an tool of externalization-institutionalization par excellence, also pivotal instrument in the process of creation of human subjectivity of identity. Since the every form of approach to reality is intermediated by language and other tools of signification, evidently this is a sort of circular model. Through the sociability man creates ontologically all, all that it is then capable to perceive in some ontological categories, all that we are able to define and accept. Processes of externalization and internalization force the man to be ontocreative in such way, that is subsequently shaped into its framework of cognition. Thus, intersubjectivity determines both ontological content and gnoseological parameters. Onticity of the sociability lies in the ontocreativity of all being that is gnoseologically accessible.

Another related topic is semantic field. In Berger/Luckmann's concept we can see how through the processes of typification and objectivization also the most general field of ideas as "meaning", "sense" and "knowledge" per se is constitued and created. When we perceive the world or reality through the mediation of institutional world, then we perceive such world or reality as an organized, structured reality, reality with some sense and meaning. Just this impression of internal order and sense is then the source for the ideas of meaning and order per se. So, both the order and idea of the orderliness of being are the aspects that are inherent to institutions, created by intersubjectivity. We can precisely see this feature when Berger and Luckmann discuss legitimizating tools of symbolic universes, especially historically most important forms as are mythology, theology, science and philosophy. Then also the philosophical way of thinking and its reflexion of reality is ontologically constructed by the social mode of human existence. Once more, every being that is receptive and accessible to the man is socially created. Every notion,

idea, category, concept and reflexion, including sacred ways of philosophy or theology is determined by the sociability/intersubjectivity of its origin.

Well, but we could say that this is quite trivial finding. Naturally, human thinking and its limits and contents have to be define and constructed by human, that is the only possible way. Why we should be interested in such banal implications? What is the difference? The important difference is: everything that is thinkable and perceptible is NOT ontologicall created by human as an individual, but by sociability, by human as an intersubjectivity, by human who is specifically embedded in certain web of relationships and interactional patterns. So it is not the man as an individual, who creates everything what he later perceives and gets to know, it is not myself as an free and independently creative being, but it is only just this social, not individual, ontocreativity. Intersubjectivity into which I was born and in which I am living is the generator of all ontical forms. Then it is something, what I alone can not control, something that had existed before I was born and what will exist after my death. Even though I participate on this ontocreative activity, as an individual, its internal processes for me as an individual are not fully accessible. They goes on in reificated space of symbolic universes and objectified reality.

Moreover, also the idea of objectivity itself, the idea of objective existence of any forms of being or the idea of objectivity per se, is also socially constructed, via language and externalizational mechanisms. Fundamental primordiality of sociability/intersubjectivity prior to anything else is based in the archetype of intersubjectivity: the encounter of two individuals "face to face". In this encounter are constructed first typifications and habitualizations, the embryos of future institutions, so not just embryos of later objective reality but also of the subjective reality and of the concept of subject as such. Right in the encounter face to face is creating selfconsciousness and selfperception, throught the so called significant others or generalized other. Thus is constructing the idea of individual Me, of subjective identity, of subject itself. Human as an individual, its identity and psychological selfrecognition, are evolving only after embedding into intersubjective structure of being. So, the ontocreativity of sociability is decisive not just for all contents of individual mind but also for the construction and constitution of this mind, for the construction of the subject. Once more the result is: we do not have a control over ourselves, over our minds and its constitutions. Selfperception and creating of our identity is quite considerably builded independently of ourselves, but of course with our more or less voluntary participation.

In this sense, the ontocreativity has two directions. At first, sociability creates institutional order and its objectivity, then this ontical product of sociability takes over this ontocreative activity and, through the intersubjectivity again, it creates ontological forms of individual consciousness. Scheme is quite circular, but this circle is still and permanently defined and demarked by the intersubjectivity. From this circular recognition streams metaposition of sociability/intersubjectivity, which is the axis of whole model, only point of interpretation which is underlying and footing the others.

As the result of these findings, there is possibility for the paradigmatical shift of interpretational ground. If all of the categories and contents of being, thinking, cognition, knowledge and identity are constructing by sociability, then it would be heuristically quite more appropriate and accurate to postulate from now on the methodological and analytical fundaments in and from the basis of intersubjectivity. That would be the shift from the subject or individuality as the point of departure for science and knowledge to the central position of relationshipness and sociability. Traditional ontological-gnoseological perspective, based on the crux of subject and of the polarity subject-object should be transformed to the fundament of intersubjectivity, which is realized through its typificational and objectivational interactions, ontocreative in their essence. Circular

conception of ontocreativity creates ontological-gnoseological framework, from which there are NO possible exits. Only quasiexit is postulation of intersubjectivity as the primordial factor, specified as metapositional, thus metaontical and metasemantic. Intersubjectivity that is working as semantic generator of ontocreativity. There is not any possible approach to intuitively assumed unsocial world of nature, physical or biological reality. Every gnoseological way is contaminated, perverted and defined by social ontocreativity. Also, the consciousness and knowledge of consciousness and knowledge per se is circularly defined by this socially constructed consciousness and knowledge. Condemnation of human to be ontically creative is at the same time ontological-gnoseological trap. We can not step out from the sociability, neither in ontological way, nor in gnoseological way.

Then, if the intersubjectivity is de facto metaontical to onticity at all, the heuristic of this conception should be build upon the mechanisms of interactions, typification, objectivization and institutionalization – thus, on the main products of ontocreativity.

And now, on this theoretical basis, what can we say about the ideas of nation, ethos, tradition, freedom and responsibility. We can start with the concept of tradition, which is the most trivial for analysis in the perspective of social constructivism. Simply said, tradition itself is nothing more or less than discussed symbolic universe, or better its part as it is legitimized by the historical needs of the particular community. Traditions are some objectified and sanctified key parts of objectified reality, Berger calls it in other work "the sacred cosmos". So they are sedimented parts of community knowledge, socially created, socially legitimized and socially induced into the existence in individual minds.

Idea or myth of the nation, of its historical sense and purpose is quite similarly constructed narration or narrative, created in most of the cases in specific historical stage, for political and power reasons (e.g. national awakening movements). We can recall Benedict Anderson's conception of Imagined Communities,[2] in which he states that a nation is a community socially constructed, which is to say imagined by the people who perceive themselves as part of that group. Mythology of nations, socially created, assumed the ability to create other significant imagined collective identities or imagined objects, such as national economy, national currency, national culture, national law or national ethos. As Pierre Bourdieu[3] precisely describes, whole system of national mythology and its attributes is founded on the process of education. School system is the tool of constructing national identity par excellence. In quite unconscious way every one of us is learned and instructed to perceive this logically speaking quite absurd idea of collective national identity, of which we are the elements and which rules over us. Thus we really believe that exists some real thing or being called Poland or Czech Republic. That this social-made institution has its rights and duties and that also we have important rights and duties to this collective identity, imagined community, construction of nation. What is more, we are able to deliberately die for this imagined conception, to kill the people who only imagine different type of collective identity. Absurdly, we came to believe that there really are some true Slovakians or Americans, and we behave with so called "strangers" accordingly. As with some different type of human being. Social construction of nation allows to sort people into national boxes and handle

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[2] ANDERSON, B.: *Imagined Communities*. London, New York: Verso 2006.

[3] BOURDIEU, P.: *Teorie jednání*. Praha: Karolinum 1998.

with them according to rights of its national identity. From the perspective of this discussion we could say: what a crazy fiction?

Idea of some national or multinational ethos is key part of this socially constructed consciousness. Ethos is conceptual core for ideas of collective identity. We believe that every nation has some of this, some ethos, and we are learned that it is really like that – through the school system and national mythology we acquire part of this ethos. In this sense, searching for some sort of Cental-European ethos is also the searching for some sort of community, maybe academic or intellectual one, that could create the content of this ethos, that could construct its denotate and then establish this concept in such way, that then some community would start to believe in this institution. That is all we need.

Finally, the ideas of freedom and responsibility. If the term freedom represents opinion, that we have some choices from which we select, then there is also an idea of independent form of this selection. Free will supposes that this will is independent in its choices. Or at least partly independent. But from the basis of social ontocreativity, every single activity and choice is essentially dependent on social parameters, on the basis of socially constructed symbolic universes, social construction of language, identity, polarity of subject-object and everything else. In this sense, idea of freedom is evidently just an illusion, illusion that allows smooth running of ontocreativity. Cynically said, the only accessible freedom is recognition of the freedom's illusiveness. Then we are aware that our choices are not under our own subjective control.

But we can ilustrate this also from the biological perspective. Ivan Martin Havel,[4] czech scientist, made some experiments in this field. Investigating the relationship between decision-making of our supposedly independent and free thinking, and the specific reactions of our body leads to paradoxical conclusion: the body does the concrete action in reality first and then the brain suggests the illusion of decision. *Thus I act before I decide to act.* I take the cup – before I "freely choose" to take it. Brain pretends, simulates the decision and we feel that we are the masters of the situations. That we wanted to do this or that. Illusion of freedom is retained.

Another quite interesting view about this chimera of freedom offers its specifically occidental genealogy.[5] Greek term "eleutheria" is untranslatable to Eastern Asian original languages, or to Hebrew, for example. When this European neologism had to be translated to Japan, Chinese or Arabic culture in the 18th and 19th century, at first it had to be done with the help of paradoxical language analogies of terms "unrestrainedness", "debauchery" or "anarchy". Which is quite contradictious to the European noble idea of freedom as the highest moral/human quality.

At last, when we look into Hebrew conception:[6] freedom here means to be owned by God. To be free means to be the subject to God's intentions toward me. The only free man is a slave, because it is the only person, who is not master of his own life. Care and concern is an act of the Lord. The only obligation a slave-servant of the Lord has is the fulfillment of God's will. Thus, the idea of so-called freedom of Hebrew is the exact opposite of our Greek definition - of notion that it is me, who control and govern myself. In the Hebrew concept I am the object of God's interest, in Greek's I am building my own interest.

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[4] DUŠEK, J.: *Rozhlasové rozhovory Duše Ká.* Archiv Českého rozhlasu 2009.

[5] PATTERSON, O.: *Freedom in the Making of Western Culture*. New York: Basic Books 1991.

PIPES, R.: *Vlastnictví a svoboda*. Praha: Argo 2008.

[6] BALABÁN, M.: *Hebrejské myšlení*. Praha: Herrmann a synové 1993.

Thus, the real freedom is anti-freedom, transcendence of self-centered ego, it is the situation, when God becomes an own subject of my identity, of myself.

In this context lies also the idea of responsibility. If the reality is socially constructed as my identity is constructed, then my responsibility dwells in Martin Buber's[7] dialogue I and Thou, Ich und Du, because this encounter is also the own core of intersubjectivity and sociability at all. Right this dialogue is the only place, where I am directly engaged in ontocreational process and so I share the responsibility for resulting objectified institutions that would be real for future encounters. So my responsibility is both miniature and absolute. Single encounter is just the smallest part of whole mechanism of ontocreativity, but at the same time, every single encounter is the axis of whole being and only possible way how to change it. In this sense, the dialogue is omnipotential and my responsibility for my participation in dialogue I and Thou is also the responsibility for the foundation of reality and being at all. Both partial and total. Independently on illusiveness of freedom or mythology of collective or personal identity, in the dialogue I and Thou, I am ontocreative, or better, *we are ontocreative*.

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