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Consideration on Political Extremisms

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Considerations on Political Extremisms

Research Assumptions

The adopted research assumptions are intended to synthetically show the most important elements that all together make up the issues of extremism in general, taking, however, into particular account the theoretical and practical essence of political extremism. Research assumptions of this kind put the main emphasis on conceptual, definitional, source-related, typological, methodological, comparative, conceptional and evaluative problems. The highly general nature of discussion, determined by the limited volume of this text, as much as compels the author to avoid descriptions of genuine manifestations of numerous forms of extremism.

The available scholarly literature dealing with political extremism, despite its overwhelming multitude, tends to disappoint the student of the problem with modest results of investigations.¹ In general, extremism per se, or the synthetic survey of the essence of all extremist forms, very seldom becomes the object of scientific research. This may be due to the fact that studies on the subject have been dominated by research interests chiefly in political extremism, whereby they acquired a one-dimensional cognitive nature, incapable of encompassing the multidimensionality of the complex phenomenon permeating the whole social reality, which is extremism in its diverse forms. A multidimensional and systematic analysis of extremism per se requires that its forms be defined and classified, their interconnections accounted for, and that differences, similarities and identity be characterized

However, even the results of studies of political extremism itself are hardly impressive. They mostly consist in ascertaining that political extremism is antidemocratic, dogmatic, fundamentalist, repressive, terroristic, etc. Therefore they indicate features that were assumed already at the start of investigations. Attempts to go beyond the cognitive one-dimensionality of political extremism towards some cognitive multidimensionality of extremism encounter a fundamental difficulty in constructing an adequately pertinent conception. As a result of narrowing the scope of investigation to political extremism, the existing

¹ All scholarly literature devoted to extremisms and accompanying phenomena is impossible to cover in its entirety by a single scholar. The information on the subject in the Internet contains hundreds of thousands of items.

literature focuses on those manifestations of extremism that are reduced to extreme forms of challenging a democratic law-governed state as a constitutional-systemic norm positioned between the spectrum of government forms of the state.

A normative interpretation of political extremism, which reduces its most profound sense to extreme forms of challenging a democratic law-governed state, only reveals vast areas of doubt but it does not explain them. First of all, a fundamental question arises whether there is a substantive connection between ends and methods. Do undemocratic means that political extremism often uses have to be necessarily coupled with undemocratic ends? Perhaps there are democratic ends that are or even should be attainable by undemocratic means? Does an end become undemocratic merely because it will be attained by undemocratic means? These questions await well-grounded answers.²

Philosophical interpretations of extremism, going back to the ideas of Aristotle in their ancient origins, contribute greatly to casting light upon contemporary political extremism, both right- and left-wing. The obtained results of studies into the main forms of contemporary political extremism, often confused with forms of political radicalism, whether right- or left-wing, are diversified and only sometimes associated with the general concept of extremism. Significant investigation results relate to contemporary right-wing extremism whereas they are negligible in the field of explaining contemporary left-wing extremism. This stems primarily from the essential transformation of the ideas, movements, parties, states and means of action defined with the common name as left-wing extremism after the collapse of the system of socialist countries, which generally dates back to 1989. Therefore, the application after this collapse of the same general terms to name the phenomena of left-wing extremism as prior to this collapse does not stimulate the development of investigations but rather impedes them. A great success of investigations would already be unambiguous discrimination between that which, in left-wing extremism, is anarchic, communist, socialist, social democratic, autonomous, motivated by protest or contestation, and terroristic.

Defining Extremism

Defining extremism in general and political extremism in particular is intended to encompass the whole of those extremisms, neither less nor more, by precise determination of their limits. Thus, by argumentation a contrario, that which is limitless, e.g. infinity is difficult to define. Argumentation by contradiction, by showing an antonym of the concept being defined, is comparatively simple when an antonym exists. For example, for the concept of 'good' – the concept of 'evil', for 'justice' – 'injustice', for the concept of 'peace'

² See e.g. G. Neugebauer: *Extremismus – Rechtsextremismus – Linksextremismus: Einige Anmerkungen zu Begriffen, Forschungskonzepten, Forschungsfragen und Forschungsergebnissen*, www.extremismus.com/texte/philex.htm

– the concept of ‘war’. The concept ‘extremism’ and one of ‘politics’ do not have obvious antonyms, which must ultimately make it difficult to define extremism in general and political extremism in particular.

Assessment of the logical status of the question what extremism is presupposes a classificatory, disjunctive, dichotomous, binary approach that requires ascertaining whether that which we are defining is extremist or not. This ascertainment will apply to the kind rather than degree of what we are defining. However, the defining of the degree of extremism, higher or lower, from some start to some limit, already presupposes the existence of identification of the type, within the scope of extremism itself. If political extremism has been identified, it can relate to different aspects of politics: ideas and practice, content and form, ends and means. We can already ask questions and try to answer to what degree a particular side of politics is extremistic. Ascertaining of what extremism is and determining its degree are complementary tasks, not mutually exclusive, in the process of defining it.³

Defining extremism consists first of all in investigating the content of the word ‘extremism’ itself and related words. We must not disregard such words here as: radicalism, terrorism – and to a lesser extent – fundamentalism, fanaticism, non-conformity and eccentricism. The antonym of all these words is a ‘mean’ in the sense of the middle course or moderation.

Dictionaries show that the word extremism derives etymologically from Latin *extremus* denoting „extreme, furthestmost, most horrible, worst, most dangerous, most disdained”, from Latin *extremitas* in the meaning of the edge or the furthest point, and from *extremum* or the external, furthestmost end.⁴ Even a general knowledge of the meaning of these words permits us to state that they contain evaluative contents, shaping the standards of that which is problematic, uncompromising, sectarian and polarizing. Our belief in the aptness of this statement is strengthened by words derived from those above: extremist, extremistic, extremal, extremum.⁵

An extremist is a man who professes extremism by adhering to extreme views on a specific matter. This is a man that will seek extreme, ultimate means: violence, putsch, terror to attain a given end – ideological, social, religious, political, economic, which goal can also be of extremist character. When this description of an extremist can be applied to a group of people, especially those associated in some social organization or political party, we are dealing with the extreme wing: a party extreme wing, the Solidarity organization’s extreme wing, or a military extreme wing. The characteristics of views and behaviour of the extremist and the extreme wing are defined with the words extreme or extremist(ic). Only the words extremal and extremum, used in mathematics to denote the local maximum or minimum of function in a definite point, have a neutral cognitive meaning, not burdened with normative evaluation.

³ I follow here the reasoning presented by G. Sartori: *Teoria demokracji*, Warsaw 1994, p. 228 et seq.

⁴ See for example K. Moeller: *Extremismus*, in: *Bernhard Schafers (Wolfgang Zapf (ed.) Handwörterbuch zur Gesellschaft Deutschlands*, Oplanden 1998, pp. 188-200.

⁵ Thus in *Słownik współczesnego języka polskiego*, vol. 1, Warsaw 1998, p. 232.

We can therefore maintain that extremism as a conception with a fairly broad colloquial and scientific usage in the present day denotes various extreme forms of thought based on extreme means of action, although not always aimed at extreme ends. To put it differently: the form of thought and means of action inhere in the essence of extremism, whereas the goals of thought and action can be part of it, yet not necessarily. Extremist thought and extremist means can but do not necessarily have to lead to extremist ends. Furthermore, we should always bear in mind that the sense of a particular brand of extremism does not have an unalterable, absolute character that is binding upon all people ever and everywhere. On the contrary, extremism is, by nature, characterized by relativism, highly prone to diversified interpretations. Therefore, that which is extraordinary extremism to someone can be ordinary moderation to someone else.

Relativism of extremism stems from the fact that its existence and degree depend on the position on the axis with some scale, extending from the extremist minimum extreme to the mean (centre) as far as the extremist maximum extreme. In politics and political science, instead of the extremist minimum extreme and the extremist maximum extreme there is the extremist left-wing extreme and the extremist right-wing extremity. The mean (centre) is the antonym of all extremist extremes, denoting, in contrast to them, something, moderate, centrist, equilibrating, harmonious, ordinary, normal, average, good, and secure. Considerations on the relations of extremisms with the mean are as old as the Western philosophical tradition of thinking. Already the ancient Greek philosophy of *polis*, or city-state, recognized the mean with its central point of *agora* or the market square as the place where one could and should successfully solve social conflicts and mitigate public controversies.

In oversimplified interpretations extremism is sometimes identified with radicalism, the extremist with the radical, and extremization with radicalization. We should remember, however, that these concepts are very close although not equivalent. Unlike extremism, radicalism is more theoretically well-founded and relates mainly to the means of action. While radicals or radicalists tend to be more of theorists rather than practitioners, extremists attach less importance to theoretical reflection. On the other hand, both revolutionists and terrorists try to balance the theoretical and practical side. Radicalization as a result of peaceful consideration can stay within legal organizational structures and procedures, whereas extremization hardly ever acquires legality.

Domestic terrorism, unlike extremism but like radicalism, focuses mainly on the means of exercising power in the state while international terrorism - on specific influence on international relations.⁶ In either case, these means consist in resorting to terror, that is, in keeping with the Latin origin of the word,

⁶ Literature on the subject of terrorism is even more abundant than on extremism. More recent studies in Polish include inter alia: V. Grotowicz: *Terroryzm w Europie Zachodniej*. Warsaw – Wrocław 2000; P. Durys, F. Jasiński: *Walka z terroryzmem międzynarodowym. Wybór dokumentów*, Bielsko-Biała 2001; J. Alexander, M. Hoerig: *Superterroryzm biologiczny, chemiczny i nuklearny*, Warsaw 2001.

to extreme forms of physical and mental violence, fear, awe, and cruelty. The goals of domestic terrorism are fairly obvious as they are aimed at the retention of power by those governing, and the goals of international terrorism aim at emphasizing the existence of some problem that unsuccessfully awaits solution. Terror belongs to the most extremist measures and means but not necessarily the ends. Extremism is able to accept such means but not the ends.

Sometimes fundamentalism, expressed in orthodox and thereby extreme observance of some norms, commands, especially religious, e.g. Islamic or Catholic, can reach the limits of extremism.⁷ Extreme, uncritical, intolerant, enthusiastic, faith-based devotion to some religious or ideological cause is called fanaticism and can also reach the limits of extremism. Non-conformity and eccentricity are attitudes of human individuals rather than those of social groups that operate on some periphery of social community. Nonconformists and eccentrics are not extremists, though – more likely they are individualists. They would become extremists if their individualism turned collective.⁸

To conclude the theme of defining extremism, this can be summed up in several points.

First, extremism is a concept that embraces sets of diverse forms of thought, means and ends of action that are assessed, when taken together, as extreme, marginal and peripheral.

Second, extremism is generally something fairly common in liberal, democratic and pluralist societies, where there is a whole spectrum of orientations, especially political ones.

Third, extremism is collective because it advocates the interests of a specific group that puts forward more or less justified demands towards the majority, accompanied by violence depending on circumstances.

Fourth, discriminations between extremists on the one side and on the other side - radicals, terrorists, fundamentalists, fanatics, and even more so nonconformists and eccentrics are rather debatable, especially from the standpoint of different social sciences.

Fifth, an extremist group is characterized by: withdrawal into their own world, self-isolation, their own peculiar mode of thinking, specific language of expression, unusual symbolism, sometimes by special knowledge, e.g. conspiracy theories, and incapability of constructive discourse.

Sixth, the result of separation of extremists from the majority of society is their awareness of being a minority, and even elite, something better than the rest of the world. This consciousness is incapable of critical self-correction but able to compensate for their failures by extreme aggression of action.

Seventh, extremist actions are as a rule, though not necessarily, based on recourse to various forms of violence.

⁷ For example, thus in J. Kaczmarek: *Terroryzm i konflikty zbrojne a fundamentalizm islamski*, Wroclaw 2001, p. 27 et seq.

⁸ E. Tiefensee von: *Extremismus aus philosophischer Sicht*, www.extremismus.com/texte/philex.htm

Eighth, extremists are quite frequently parasitic on the liberty-based opportunities of infiltration of the democratic law-governed state, resulting in the weakening or even destruction of its institutions.

Finally, ninth, extremists operate in the name of somehow defined social development or progress.⁹

Sources of Extremism

Throughout the history of mankind it would be impossible to count, let alone describe thoroughly, all manifestations of extremism. It occurred in the sphere of thought and in the sphere of faith, in the sphere of spontaneous human behaviour and in the sphere of means of action. Without reflecting, by its nature, generally accepted norms and the understanding of reality, extremism was expressed in attempts, full of violent impatience, to change reality using the means based on more or less brutal coercion.

Extremism pervaded the history of all societies: only in some societies it was overt whereas in others it was camouflaged with propaganda and ideology. Extremism, almost entirely invisible in historical perspectives, and more visible in the perspective of the present day, is most visible in historical retrospectives. From the retrospective of our present day, we regard as extremist both the ancient form of state government called theocracy and the social structure based on slavery, and public shows of people fighting against wild animals. We think likewise about medieval social debasement of the serfs or about the Crusades that brought mass death and destruction. In later epochs we could say something like that about the persecution of Galileo, witches burning at the stakes or about extreme atrocities during the so-called great revolutions: English, French or October revolution.

In the days counted as contemporary, political extremism attained the extremes of extremism in two totalitarian forms: Stalinism and Hitlerism (Nazism). The two historical super-extremists – Stalin and Hitler – were able to harness science, technology and first of all the force of millions of people as the means to their obsessive, insane extremist ends. Around the late nineteen-sixties there started to grow brands of extremism called domestic terrorism and international terrorism. Since then, according to the political scientist James Gardner, we can even speak about the 'age of extremism'. Gardner adduces the statement of Theodore Kaczyński, the American unabomber, as allegedly significant for the ways of viewing our present day: „The world today seems to be going crazy”.¹⁰

The English historian Eric Hobsbawm calls our epoch 'the century of extremes'. He sees the sources of this condition in the rampant folly of political

⁹ During the Vietnam intervention, American military extremists called 'hawks', in the name of alleged or actual spread of democracy in the world, used to propagate a saying: *Saving a village by destroying it*. During the war with Iraq in 2003 the saying was expressed in the following way: *Liberating the Iraqi people by killing them*.

¹⁰ Tiefensee von: *Extremismus ...*, op. cit., p. 1 et seq.

terror unleashed by the French revolution of 1789. In the light of this interpretation, the sea of blood stirred by the French Revolution spilt all over Europe, what's more, all over the world, in the next centuries. The sea of blood broke the cohesion of the lofty slogan of 'liberty, equality, fraternity' pasted on the banners of French revolutionaries. This slogan shows its practical usefulness only when an intricate balance is retained between its three constituent political values. This usefulness disappeared, however, when liberty degenerated into the extremism of economic liberalism, equality into the extremism of Stalinist and Maoist totalitarianism, and fraternity into the extremism of national or racist fascist community.¹¹

Despite its ancient roots and manifestations, the term 'extremism' appeared in colloquial speech comparatively recently. In the early nineteenth century it started to be used by the English daily newspapers. At present, this term is widely used, both in everyday speech and in scientific language, mostly the jargon of political scientists and jurists. It is also found in the parlance of state security officials or persons involved in the so-called international security. The events of the type of ethnic or state nationalism aroused after 1989, religious extremisms, as well the terrorist attack on the Trade World Center and the Pentagon in Washington, D.C., and, in the belief of many, response to the doings of American militarist „hawks”, all those indicate that the „womb from which all this sprang up is still fertile”.¹²

In this painfully realistic context, abstract explanations concerning the sources of extremism pale considerably. For example, Daniel Bell perceives the sources of extremism in that for over a hundred years we have exaggerated in exaggeration, whereby the atmosphere of our times is pervaded by pride, striving for excess, to go beyond the bounds, precisely because of contempt for the bounds, because of our desire for novelty and going beyond the bounds to attain a goal that is always beyond morality, beyond tragedy and beyond culture.¹³ Also hardly convincing, in relation to the extremes of political extremism, is the explanation offered by Sartori, saying that each generation wants to be new and original, each feels that it has to say something that has never been said before and challenges all previous assertions, but it is not easy to be original. It is the easiest if someone knows very little, that is why there those that seek originality in extremism.¹⁴

Typologies of Extremism

The presentation of all known typologies of extremism can be regarded as a separate ambitious research undertaking in itself. Without attempting such

¹¹ Ibid., op. cit.

¹² Ibid., p. 2.

¹³ D. Bell: *The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism*, New York 1976, p. 50. Bell uses the term *beyondism* to denote going beyond norms accepted by the majority of society, thus something approximating extremism.

¹⁴ Sartori: *Teoria demokracji*, op. cit., p. 616.

a project but also without entirely abandoning a very general presentation of such a typology, we should stress its theoretical importance in contrast to its practical significance.

It is an accurate statement formulated by Backes and Jesse, two renowned students of extremism: „Typological distinctions fulfil ... only an ancillary heuristic function: they serve to initiate cognitive processes, they cannot thus be mistaken for reality per se.”¹⁵ Typologization of diverse phenomena estimated as extremist should be aware of their alternation and open to that which is novel. For that reason therefore it should be constantly verified on the basis of the identified reality. The formulation of any typology, based even on the best-founded and well-established distinctions between the left-wing and the right-wing, does not mean either everlasting or even more so, binding truths. This is ex post ascertainment of a system of thought, useful in explaining the etiology, ontology and axiology of extremism, rather than extremism itself as a phenomenon of reality.

Attempts at typologization appear already in the process of defining extremism in order to avoid granting an unlimited definitional quality to its given phenomenology. This is the target sought by both the followers of the *definitio ex negativo* of extremism and by those espousing the *definitio ex positivo*. The former define political extremism as a specific divergence from the normative (constitutional) systemic framework of the democratic law-governed state. Therefore, they merely establish what extremism is not. The latter, however, relying on the definition-binding ascertainment of what political extremism is, approve of the danger of rejecting new meanings arising from the changes and development of extremism. While the former construct an upside-down theory of political extremism, the latter would like to put it on its feet. It seems, though, that a radical change in the definition of political extremism without relating it to the mean, in the sense of constitutional norms of the democratic law-governed state, might lead to political and conceptual chaos because of the loss of a special guiding compass, which these norms are.¹⁶

Etiological criteria that open the paths of mind for investigating the sources and origin of extremism point to intellectual and emotional, psychological and sociological, and economic and political contents. All these contents can, to some extent and degree, co-shape given forms of extremism, although we can always indicate a decisive factor among them. Political extremism may ultimately result from deliberate ideological indoctrination influencing the human intellect, a situational culmination of emotions of a social group, the outbreak of psychological tensions of individuals that are manifested on the sociological forum, a desperate act of the paupers, from political manipulation etc. This can

¹⁵ U. Backes, E. Jesse (eds.): *Politischer Extremismus in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland*, Neuausgabe, Bonn 1996, p. 54.

¹⁶ Cf. U. Backes: *Politischer Extremismus in demokratischen Verfassungsstaaten. Elemente einer normativen Rahmentheorie*, Oplanden 1989, passim.

and should be determined only on the basis of investigation of the reality of extremism.¹⁷

Ontological criteria, by defining the contents and differences between them, lay the foundations for distinguishing individual and group extremism, and domestic and international extremism. While the concept of individual extremism produces rather fundamental objections mentioned before, the concept of group extremism is at the same time largely a description of domestic extremism and international extremism that are distinguished basing on the criterion of state borders. While domestic extremism, whether American, German, Russian, or Polish, remains within the frontiers of a given country, international extremism goes beyond these borders.

Human groups that violate the law and are associated with extremism include especially some religious sects, cult groups, youth gangs and terrorists. The recognized common thread of extremist groups of this kind are abnormal needs or serious psychological problems of their members. When seeking support in a group, its members, for fear of being rejected, become extremely loyal to it and capable of extreme i.e. extremist behaviour. These actions are based more on belief than reason, which is why the members are most often able, without inhibition, to use even the most dangerous means of action. Obediently and with extreme submission, they defer to the commands of the group leader, who is often charismatic, which ensures intra-group discipline and the destructive power of action of the extremist group. The goals, means, beliefs and cult rituals of the extremist group cause its conflict with the social environment manifested by one-sided or mutual hostility.¹⁸

Axiological criteria, the values shared by members of a group or an extremist organization, permit us to distinguish inter alia religious and secular extremisms, and left-wing and right-wing extremisms. Between these brands of extremism there is no gap: they can interact to some extent, less so interpenetrate. In the case of political extremisms, the kinds of extremism distinguished here occur on the common axis of the political spectrum of political thought, means of political action, forms of state government and other manifestations of that kind. Secular, left-wing and right-wing extremisms belong to typical manifestations of extremism that have been characterized elsewhere and in connection with other problems of extremism. At this point we can therefore only mention the character of religious extremism.

Religious extremism is of great non-theological importance insofar as it intermingles with religious moral, legal and political doctrines, e.g. Catholic social doctrine. Comparative theological studies demonstrate that religious extremism with serious implications for political extremism has found its fullest expression in Christian religion. From many points of view, these comparative studies regard Christian religion as a paradigm of extremisms. No other religion

¹⁷ The monographic study *Political Extremism and Rationality*, ed. By Albert Breton, Gianluigi Galeotti, Pierre Salmon, Ronald Wintrobe, Cambridge University press 2000 reduces too hastily the complex essence of extremism to irrational behaviour.

¹⁸ *Extremism: Cults, Gangs, and Terrorists* by Edward J. Tully, <http://neiassociates.org/cults.htm>

even comes nearly as close to Christianity in this respect. The description of God the Father and His son Jesus Christ consists in attributing extreme features to them. According to the Bible God is not limited by anything, cannot be compared with anything, living in the utmost degree, with the absolute power over the world; He proves His omnipotence with powerful acts; invisible by nature, yet He shows His undeniably personal nature etc. Similar extreme features were vested by Christianity in Jesus Christ.¹⁹

Extremism and Philosophy

The starting point of philosophical investigations into the essence of extremism is generally regarded to be Aristotelian knowledge of the mean (*mesotes*) and the relation between the mean and the extremes. In his memorable work *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle described human fundamental attitudes – virtues that help people cope in life. In his developed catalogues of virtues he included inter alia courage, moderation, love of truth, politeness. Searching for a common feature of all virtues, he saw it in contact with passions inherent in human nature: lust, anger, fear, comfort, envy, joy, love, hate, longing, jealousy, and sympathy. „To experience these passions in the right time, for right reasons, towards right people, for the right purpose and right way – is both the conscious and best road, and that is the essential feature of ethical courage.”²⁰

Since with all passions it is possible to exaggerate either way, virtue is the ability to find the right mean (Greek *mesotes*, *medietas* in Latin). For example, the virtue of courage can be placed between cowardice and rashness, while in relation to passion – between excess and lack of courage or between excess and lack of fear. Ethics, like politics, is not pure theory but also practice, where the main problem lies in how to find the right mean. In relation to the thing itself a mean is an arithmetical category, easy to determine; however, in relation to human behaviour, the optimum point does not always lie just in the middle.

Aristotle stated that that which is good is rare, praiseworthy and morally beautiful.²¹ A mean between two extremes is not what the majority represents, rather it is an exception. A mean is not tantamount to the mediocre but in its rarity it is also an extreme. While explaining why a mean in ethics does not always lie in the middle, Aristotle pointed out that one of the extremes of a given virtue is more like it than the other, e.g. rashness is more like action than cowardice. Therefore, people will go more readily towards the extremes that stand out and convene their natural inclinations. From the fact which extreme a person perceives most, we can draw conclusions about his/her secret inclinations. This has practical consequences for striving to find the right mean: one must oppose the inclination perceived more intensely.

¹⁹ *Extremism: A Hallmark of Christianity* by Randall A. Terry <http://www.fellowshipofchrist.org/stories/extremism.htm>

²⁰ Arystoteles: *Etyka nikomachejska*, translated by Daniela Gromska, 1106b, Warsaw 1982, p. 56.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 1109a, p. 68.

Further analysis tells us to examine the relation of too little – the mean – too much, which produces as a result three opposites and three areas of conflict. „All these dispositions mutually oppose one another in a way, but the two extremes oppose both the mean and each other, whereas the mean is the opposite of both the extremes.”²² It should also be borne in mind that from the standpoint of the extremes the mean appears to deserve being challenged by the extremes. For example, society, which strongly fights right-wing extremism, appears from the right-wing extremist’s perspective as oriented towards the left, despite the fact that it actually leans towards right-wingery. Social psychologists maintain that groups tend to approach closely the extreme that they fight against most intensely.

Certainly, the extremes also remain in a state of conflict with each other. Mutual differences between them are also certainly greater than differences between them and the mean. Despite this, both extremes have one feature in common: as extremes they are in conflict with the mean, and in certain cases they might even join forces in order to fight the mean. This also explains why extremists are able to relatively easily and quickly pass from one extreme to another. In German political practice some of the brown (Nazis) were later reds (communists) and then brown again. From the position of the mean, extremes share one common feature that they are defects, unable to live in the long run. They possess features that eventually destroy them.

In the political sphere the mean always appears as a more pragmatic attitude in relation to the principled attitude that extremists adopt. Thinking in terms of the mean is thinking in terms of the possibility and ability to implement, unlike the extreme uncompromising attitude that smacks of utopianism. The mean, better suited to living, is at the same time a less attractive position in the political spectrum; it seems to contain „a little of everything”, which deprives it of originality and autonomy. According to some interpretations, Aristotelian ethos of the [golden] mean appears as a glorification of the mediocre. „Neither fish, nor fowl”, that is how Günter Maschke scolded liberalism. „Liberalism is neither warm nor hot, liberalism is neither hot nor cold. Neither on the left-wing nor on the right-wing, it is an intermediate product in an intermediate world. It is this and that at the same time and something more. It is neither this nor that.”²³ Although liberalism feeds on moderation it is plain averageness and mediocrity.

The interpretation of the mean as the plain average and the mediocre is considered a misunderstanding by those who regard themselves as well versed in Aristotle’s philosophy. They claim that the mean is a virtue while the plain average and the mediocre would be a mixture of virtues and vices. The mean is no mediocrity but a synthesis which, Hegel believes, can be maintained only with the utmost effort. To find and maintain the mean is the extreme of a moral or political effort, everything else is easier to attain. The mean is a point of the scale on the axis, by which extremes are compelled

²² Ibid., 1108b, p. 65.

²³ Tiefensee von: *Extremismus ...*, op. cit., p. 6

to measure themselves, even when this scale can be identified only from the points of extremes. As Kant observed, the difference between virtue and vice is not gradable because it has the nature of a qualitative difference. Virtue is something different from vice and is not a mixture of the two. The average is thus insufficiency in relation to what would have to be done to retain the mean. The average is an extremism of the mean.²⁴

As Hans Sedelmayer put it in his study *Verlust der Mitte* (1984), since the Enlightenment, while striving for autonomy, man has lost the central position in the Universe.²⁵ This happened for example in the case of complicated processes of formation of political groups for specific matters and in the face of constantly changing political coalitions. Thinking directed at the mean as the scale of everything political has become difficult. The agora used to be the centre of the Greek polis, whereas now it is increasingly difficult to determine the town's central point. To some it is the church, to others the town hall, to still others the banks, insurance companies or shopping malls on the outskirts of town. Like the modern city, also the modern man does not have the mean at his disposal.

The loss of the mean (centre) by the modern man stems from the lack of the bounds of the world he lives in. The discovery that the Earth is a sphere, even with a finite area, at the same time showed its boundlessness without the geographical centre. The central point of the world is no longer defined by Rome of the „middle kingdom” – China, or by Moscow that used to aspire to this role. The number of people making up mankind is also becoming unlimited. City limits disappear and so do state frontiers; disappearance of frontiers in this dynamic world seems to be a ubiquitous process. Without borders there are no contours within which we might mark the centre (mean), and without defining the mean (centre), it is impossible to determine the extremes. He that loses the mean in the face of infinity and boundlessness, because this mean cannot be devised or marked because of lack of contours, also loses the extremes, he loses the measures of what is a norm, what is already an extreme. The present-day man is lost in the world because there is no unambiguously defined mean and extremes.

Contemporary philosophical literature, also in political philosophy, reduces the possibility of compensation for the lost mean to three ways. First, a proposal of assigning the mean to the majority or a particular group, for example the middle class. However, the majority does not guarantee either truth or usefulness, clearly tending towards the average, while the middle class aspiring to the position of the elite does not exhibit the features of elitism. Second, we could repeat after Nietzsche that „the mean is everywhere”, which would in fact mean relinquishing the mean (centre), extreme individualization and autonomization of human behaviour, thus challenging general social and political ideas. Third, there are those who, instead of one centre (mean) or as many centres as there are people, put forward a polycentric conception – a specified

²⁴ Ibid., p. 7 et seq.

²⁵ H. Sedelmayer: *Verlust der Mitte*, Bonn 1948.

number of centres (means), as did postmodernists. Finally, fourth, some seek the mean outside this world: in the world of religion, utopia, in the world of dreams. In order, however, to avoid the accusation of excessive speculativeness, we should again refer to Aristotle, who would seek the lost mean by means of the idea of justice. He spoke about justice that although it is not a mean like the other virtues but a virtue that creates a mean for other virtues.²⁶

Political Extremism

Political extremism is a narrower concept than extremism in general, but broader than left-wing and right-wing extremism. On the whole, political extremism is a set of forms of political thought and political behaviour based on it, situated on the extremes of the axis reflecting by its scale the whole actual and diversified political spectrum of a given time and place, with its mean or centre as the point of reference.²⁷ Extremists use first of all two forms of thought – idea and poorly developed ideology, usually with a low degree of rationalization but highly imbued with emotionality, which they adopt as their programme of action. The extremist inventory of means of action, which never acquires the character of a mass political movement and less so a social movement, contains the means that especially ensure swift attainment of the goal. These are therefore the means based on physical and mental coercion, causing bloodshed and producing fear psychosis. Extremists are hardly concerned about maintaining any proportion between the means applied and the ends; even a comparatively insignificant goal can be attained by them using potent means.²⁸

Like all manifestations of extremism, also political extremism is characterized by relativism in time and space. What in a given place and/or time is political extremism, in another time and/or place would not be one at all. What determines this is the occupation by political extremism of an extreme position or positions on the axis of the spectrum reflecting the real pattern of forces in relation to their political mean or political centre. Certainly, like any political force situated on this axis, also political extremism, as a living, dynamic political phenomenon, can change its place on it. In order to retain its vitality, however, it cannot lose its extreme character, which is why left-wing extremism will turn into right-wing extremism, or the other way round, more easily than into some moderate form of the left-wing or right-wing.

²⁶ Tiefensee von: *Extremismus...*, op. cit., p. 9 et seq.

²⁷ An interesting headword: political extremism was compiled by Ryszard Herbut in: *Leksykon politologii*, a collective study with scientific eds. Andrzej Antoszewski and Ryszard Herbut, Wrocław 2002, p. 86 et seq. Also, M. Haase: *Politischer Extremismus* in: D. Nohlen (ed.) *Wörterbuch Staat und Politik*, Munich 1996, p. 606. Cf. also a similar headword in *Encyclopedia of Modern American Extremists and Extremist Groups* by Stephen E. Atkins, Greenwood house 2002.

²⁸ These means include chiefly revolution. In many American universities political science programmes contain the subject: Revolution and Political Extremism. An ample collection of current literature on extremist and terrorist means used in politics can be found on the website: Extremists and Terrorism. Books for investigators. <http://www.extremistgroups.com/textbooks.html>.

The broadest spectrum of political forces is found on the liberal axes of government systems, especially on the axis of the democratic, constitutional law-governed state. These are accurate opinions that maintain that except extremist political forces on these axes, the other forces, more or less supporting the existing system of government, are prosystemic. On the other hand, through their alternative forms of political thought, determined by radical means of action, and by striving to legally or illegally change the existing pattern of political forces, extremist political forces turn against the existing government system, thus acquiring an antisystemic character.²⁹ That antisystemic character of extremist political forces distinctly manifests itself after analyzing the contents of their political thought, positioned on the extremes of the left-wing or the extremes of the right-wing, and challenging the legitimacy of the existing government system.

Political extremism is fairly commonly regarded as a product of irrational behaviour, charged with the lack of rational consideration. In liberal government systems, especially in the democratic, constitutional law-governed state, the existence of political extremism seems to contradict the idea that participation in political activity is motivated by rational choices. Yet political extremism can be also examined as a rational relation of the groups that have to struggle with great social hardship under the conditions of flagrant asymmetry in the distribution of political profits. Most contemporary forms of political thought assume, however, that participants in political processes are rational.³⁰ They also confirm that political extremism can be defined and utilized as a useful research tool conducive to understanding political conflicts.

The twentieth century of the history of Western culture and civilization, analyzed in political terms, passed under the banner of democracy wrestling with its opposites – left-wing and right-wing extremisms, especially communism and fascism. Even after the collapse of the socialist system, enclaves of left-wing extremism survived in the world, while the forces of right-wing extremism such as religious fundamentalisms and ethnic nationalisms have even become strengthened.

Considerations on the political role of extremisms presuppose the need to examine the relations between them and democracy as a structure of political moderation. In view of the aforementioned regularities resulting from interaction of the mean with the extremes, we should watch out lest democracies, while fighting against extremisms, become extremism themselves.³¹ Such fears may arise especially in the wake of extremely imperial actions in the world, of the United States, which styles itself the model of democracy.³²

²⁹ Thus aptly by Herbut: *Ekstremizm polityczny*, op. cit., p. 86 et seq.

³⁰ For more cf. R. Tokarczyk: *Współczesne doktryny polityczne* (Contemporary political doctrines), 11th ed., Zakamycze 2002. In the context of extremism, the idea of the world without ideology is still preserved. e.g. in the circle of the Club of Rome, <http://www.ecumene.org/hassan0203.htm>

³¹ On the moderating influence of the law-governed state's democratic institutions upon political extremism see an interesting account by P. Gosh; *Electoral Competition, Moderating Institutions and Political Extremism*, University of British Columbia 2002.

³² Regarding various estimates of the highly controversial US invasion of Iraq in 2003, it is widely known that there are many supporters of the evaluation, which regards the invasion as a flagrant manifestation of political state terrorism or international political extremism.

Extremism and Political Science

Political science is generally sceptical about developing theories of extremism, even more so about establishing a new science of extremism. Despite the fact that chances of establishing such a science are very slim, the political-science theory of political extremism is developing. This theory perceives in the constitutional, normative core of the democratic law-governed state the starting definition point for investigations as the basis of division into that which is, on the one hand, politically democratic and anti-extremist, and on the other hand, that which is extremist and antidemocratic. Here is one of definitions of this theory, called a normative theory of political extremism: „The concept of political extremism should be understood as a collective term applied to various political views and actions that share the common challenge to the democratic, constitutional state and its fundamental values.”³³

The complexity of the democratic law-governed state leads to diversity of its evaluations. Even political extremism theorists do not see in this form of government some ideal state order binding for all times. They start not so much from state structures as from fundamental values, which these structures are supposed to defend, first of all from the foundations of human life with dignity and human coexistence. From the normative theory of extremism stems a division that runs across other, not necessarily value-based typologies, e.g. a distinction between left-wingery and right-wingery. In terms of values, in the qualitative sense, in relation to the centre, both leftist-extremists and rightist-extremist political forces are the same: either type is undemocratic.

A somewhat different version of the normative theory of extremism is one based on the division of political forces, especially parties, into extreme-leftist anti-capitalist and extreme-rightist antidemocratic. The basis for this division are the criteria of capitalism and democracy, theoretically situated on different levels, which, however, do not in fact have to exclude one another. A belief generally prevails that there are no extreme-rightist anti-capitalist political forces, especially parties, which is why the combination of „antidemocratic/ anti-capitalist” could be regarded as a product of a sick mind. It is certainly not an error, though, to assert that all left-wing forces are on the whole more or less anti-capitalist-oriented, which does not have to mean at the same time that they democratic. In this theory the boundaries between the theoretical and the political do not coincide; therefore only the analysis of the actual political patterns can serve to verify its validity.³⁴

Numerous accusations have been made against the normative theory of extremism. Students of right-wing extremism charge that „it does not encompass the complexity of social phenomenon of crisis” as a source of

³³ Jürgen P. Lang von: *Die Extremismustheorie zwischen Normativität und Empirie*, VRL: <http://www.extremismus.com/texte/extrem.htm>, p. 1 shares the views of Backes and Jesse in this respect: *Politischer Extremismus ...*, op. cit., p. 45 et seq.

³⁴ Lang von: *Die Extremismustheorie...*, *ibid.*, p. 2.

extremism. According to other reservations, the normative theory of political extremism creates „a pseudo-scientific basis for seeking alleged enemies”, e.g. for the domineering and negative pigeonholing of some part of society.

Another shortcoming of the normative theory of political extremism is believed to be its domination by a one-dimensional point of view – trying to perceive the state or its individual organs as the principal norms. A more appropriate measure in defining what is political extremism would be to use as a criterion the „force of definition of the judicial branch and majority culture”. A question arises, nevertheless, what would happen if culture of the majority were dominated by extremists, whether left- or right-wing. Would everybody then like to profess such a culture? These considerations show how easy it is to open the door to unlimited analytical arbitrariness. In order to avoid such arbitrary practices, we should analyze extremism through normative categories that make up the value canon of the democratic, constitutional law-governed state.³⁵

The canon of values of the democratic, constitutional law-governed state was defined by the German Federal Constitutional Tribunal in 1952 as follows: the basic democratic and freedom-based order is one, which, having excluded each kind of authority based on violence and lawlessness, constitutes the authority's lawful order on the basis of the nation's self-determination, by the will of the majority and on the basis of liberty and equality. The fundamental principles of this order should include as a minimum: respect for basic human rights specified in the statute, chiefly for a person's right to life and free development, sovereignty of the nation, separation of powers, responsibility of government, legality of administration, independence of courts of law, the principle of the multi-party system and equal opportunities for all political parties with a right to form the constitutional opposition and take active opposition measures.”³⁶

The German official conception of political extremism has since consisted in determining that which contradicts the canon of values of the democratic constitutional law-governed state. Thus, in contradiction to this canon are plans or actions aimed to disrupt the functioning of the democratic law-governed state, and even more so to destroy it. It should be observed that before 1973 German constitutional experts did not speak of extremism but left-wing or right-wing radicalism. Since 1974, even German professional political-science and legal literature has interchangeably used the terms ‘radicalism’ and ‘extremism’, without precise discrimination. A proposal has not been accepted so far that the term ‘extremism’ should be reserved to denote threats to the Constitution, while the term ‘radicalism’ be applied to a broader scope of threats to the democratic law-governed state.³⁷

³⁵ Ibid., p. 3 et seq.

³⁶ *Entscheidungen des Bundesverfassungsgerichts (BverfEE)*, vol. 2, p. 12.

³⁷ For more see Neugebauer: *Extremismus ...*, op. cit., p. 3 et seq.

Left-wing and Right-wing Extremism

The collective term 'left-wing extremism' comprises first of all the thought and practice of anarchism, autonomous groups and various brands of communism. Anarchists especially threaten centralist forms of organization. Autonomous groups challenge many authorities. Both anarchists and members of autonomous groups use the means similar to those employed by terrorists. Various brands of communism, however, refer with varying intensity to the ideas of Marx, Engels, Lenin, Stalin, Trotsky, Mao Zedong, less often to Che Guevara and Fidel Castro.

In the past, on account of the intensity of left-wing extremism, three main currents of communism were distinguished: Soviet communism, Maoism and Trotskyism. Soviet communism, while using extremist measures in internal policies, strove, in its foreign policy based on the concept of peaceful coexistence, to achieve gradual victory of communism all over the world. The collapse of Soviet communism dealt a serious blow to this trend of left-wing extremism. Maoism accused Soviet-style communism of revisionism that consisted in abandoning the idea of a world revolution. Split up into many factions, Trotskyism strongly distanced itself from real socialism, both in the Soviet Union and China, deploring their bureaucratic degeneracy.

We can accept the view that the common denominator of all left-wing extremisms is to see all manner of roots of social evil in a capitalist class society.³⁸ Like right-wing extremism, also left-wing extremism goes back to the roots of the 1789 French revolution. However, unlike bourgeois democrats, the radical left, later to be called proletarian, did not want to be satisfied with mere democratization of the political sphere. For its radicalists, democracy would be possible only after a revolutionary transformation of the economic sphere as a condition for real universal freedom and equality. Depending on the attitude of individual left-wing groups towards an economic revolution, the centre-left, the left and the ultra left (counted as left-wing extremism) were distinguished.

The collective term 'right-wing extremism' applies mainly to two brands of political thought and practice: fascism and nationalism, racism being only sometimes associated with right-wing extremism. In the broadly conceived right, there are distinguished centre-right and right-wing groups, especially parties, and ultra-rightist ones associated with right-wing extremism. If extremism challenges the fundamental principle of human equality, it is defined as right-wing extremism. If, however, it applies the principle of equality to all spheres of life and suppresses the idea of individual freedom at the same time, then we are dealing with left-wing extremism in the form of communism. Left-wing

³⁸ German scholars show probably the greatest interest in left-wing and right-wing extremism after 1989, but mainly in the latter. For more see inter alia *Links- und rechtsextremismus in Deutschland. Ideologie, Ursachen, Erscheinungsformen. Gemeinsamkeiten und Unterschiede*, ed. by Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz, Cologne 1993; R.R. Benthin: *Die Neue Rechte in Deutschland und ihr Einfluss auf den politischen Diskurs der Gegenwart*, Frankfurt/M. 1996; E. Jasse: *Linksextremismus in: E. Holtman (ed.), Politik Lexikon*, Munich-Vienna 2003, p. 356/.

extremism also includes anarchism, for which any form of statehood appears repressive.

The fundamental difference between left-wing extremism and right-wing extremism lies in that the former is anti-capitalist and not necessarily democratic while the latter is antidemocratic and pro-capitalist. This difference on principles is relativized by the fact that the methods of exercising power by communist and fascist regimes can be very much alike. It does therefore make sense to distinguish between totalitarian regimes on the one hand, and the leftist or rightist attempts on the other. This distinction is particularly significant in the sphere of political means since not all participants in political life that have antidemocratic ends use antidemocratic methods in democratic systems, e.g. for fear of state repression.

What all extremists share is the claim of right to exclusively represent whole communities, a challenge to the pluralist-democratic system, dogmatism, thinking in terms of friend or foe, and fanaticism that justifies every means that leads to an end. However, the common features of extremists seen in their opposition to the democratic law-governed state cannot conceal fundamental differences that divide them. As a result, extremist groups can be in different relations with one another – from alliances to fighting one another with soft means to brutal struggle by all means possible. Seeking similarities and differences – comparative studies of extremisms – should be a major research target of political science.

Extremism and Terrorism

The origin of the terms 'terrorism' and 'terrorist' dates back further than that of the concepts of 'extremism' and 'extremist'. The former appeared during the French revolution of 1789, then in the positive sense to refer to the actions of the Jacobins. It was only later that these words came to denote adversely evaluated acts based on violence and directed against governments and societies. The latter – 'extremism' and 'extremist' have functioned in wider circulation since as late as circa the mid-twentieth century and they have never had positive reference. The United States Department of Justice defines domestic terrorism as: „The unlawful use of force committed by a group(s) of two or more individuals, against persons or property to intimidate or coerce a government, the civilian population or any segment thereof, in furtherance of political or social objectives.”³⁹

The Dictionary of Political Thought defines extremism as follows: A vague term, which can mean: 1) Taking a political idea to its limits, regardless of «unfortunate» repercussions, impracticalities, arguments and feelings to the contrary, and with the intention not only to confront, but also to eliminate

³⁹ I have borrowed the following definitions from the study by S. M. Presley: *Rise of Domestic Terrorism and Its relation to United States Armed Forces*, April 19, 1996, <http://academic.udayton.edu/race/06hrights/WaronTerrorism/military03.htm>.

opposition. 2) Intolerance towards all views other than one's own. 3) Adoption of means to political ends which show disregard for the life, liberty, and human rights of others.⁴⁰

Frank G. McGuire, a renowned expert on terrorist and extremist groups, characterizes the essence of extremism as having three things in common. First, extremists commonly represent some attempt to distort reality for themselves and others. Secondly, they try to discourage critical examination of their beliefs, either by false logic, rhetorical trickery or some kind of intimidation. And finally, extremists represent an attempt to act out private, personal grudges or rationalize the pursuit of special interests in the name of the public welfare.⁴¹

It is not easy to clearly differentiate terrorism from extremism., although prima facie the use of violence appears to be an adequate starting point for distinction. However, a more convincing differentiation of terrorism from extremism is apparent in differences in the scope and social acceptance of the two. Extremism is found in different forms and in many spheres of social life, for example as political extremism. It is usually controlled to some extent by civil discourse, education, societal pressure and the law. Terrorism, on the other hand, is hard to control, socially unacceptable and regarded as a punishable offence.⁴²

Political extremism is regarded as a manifestation of different human views, attitudes and behaviours in a democratic pluralist society. It is not easy, though, to explain why terrorists terrorize. Many answers have been offered to the question and more continue to be formulated. Here are some of them. First, terrorists are irrational, psychopathic and even suffering from mental diseases. Second, terrorists are inflamed with a desire to take revenge or retaliate for something or on somebody. Third, terrorists intend to make the hated regime pay for damage they will do thus forcing concessions or even capitulation. Fourth, terrorists attempt to provoke attack on themselves in order to exploit it for propaganda. Fifth, terrorists attempt to win wide publicity and support through their actions. Sixth, combating political terrorism is more difficult than fighting political extremism.

Extremism and Practice

In everyday life, to call someone or his behaviour extremist arouses fear, distrust and readiness to wrestle with something unexpected and surprising. But in political rhetoric these names are used to accuse the opponent of being too far away from the positions we regard as right ourselves. Extremist names are often used in a political struggle between the left-wing or right wing and the centre on the one hand, and on the other – between the left and the right. The use of extremism-based terms resembles killing two birds with one stone:

⁴⁰ Ibid., loc. cit.

⁴¹ Ibid., loc. cit.

⁴² Cf. ibid. loc. cit.

it stigmatizes the opponent, e.g. an opponent of the left-wing as undemocratic and it includes the speaker him/herself among the ranks of 'real democrats'.

Those who approve of moderation, the middle course or even of striving to attain the 'golden mean', urge us to fight extremists. Philosophers advise that we need practical wisdom in order to fight terrorism. A necessary prerequisite to attaining practical wisdom is a well-developed ability to observe ourselves and to draw apt conclusions from given situations tending towards extremism. Observation of ourselves in order to seek moderation, the mean, is a constant analysis of our inclinations to restrain their extremes. The knowledge of tradition and culture might prove useful at this point. A good constitution that regulates the system of government expresses statutory, political, practical wisdom. Which is why the democratic constitutional law-governed state is so often and readily referred to in order to ascertain the scope and degree of political extremisms.

The capacity to perceive extremism is a sign of hope in the face of loss of the mean. For those that perceive extremisms per se, apparently sense, at least intuitively, the existence of a mean. Just as the state order is more appreciated when it starts to disappear, so is the mean when there are extremes. Its is only injustices that arouse hopes for justice. Therefore, each extremism is, in a sense and unfortunately most frequently in an undesirable form, a specific challenge that rouses culture from lethargy. Extremisms do not agree with that which is conservative, dogmatic, allegedly infallible, in majority and average.⁴³

Faced with the pressure of extremists, the mean has to take its own weakness into consideration. Extremists most eagerly attack that which is still historically comparatively new and not established, thus making its defence difficult. The favourite targets of extremists include human rights, the idea of tolerance, equal rights of races, nations, genders, and religions. Because, instead of seeking the mean, that is virtue and moderation, between extremes we have a tendency to seek them between the mean and an extreme, or between virtue or moderation and vice or immoderation, we are tempted to make concessions in the area of pluralism and to narrow down the range of social choices to a closed alternative. The political art. consists in weakening the force of extremist pressure through mediation everywhere there are social conflicts laden with destructive extremisms.

In order that mediations could restrain extremism, it is necessary to set high standards to mediators, especially to their way of thinking and language. It is common knowledge that extremist forms of thinking are easier to verbalize than those of moderate thinking. Inability to use the language in a balanced manner stimulates and strengthens extremisms. Unbalanced language reflects topical thinking in black and white terms and also supports this kind of thinking. It divides the world into constituents intolerant of one another, thus leaning towards extremisms. Totalitarianisms, as a manifestation of both left-wing and right-wing extremisms, are based on established images of the enemy, towards whom aggressive rhetoric is used. The language of mediation should, however,

⁴³ For more see Tiefensee von: *Extremismus...*, op. cit., p. 9 et seq.

avoid extreme expressions of aggressive rhetoric, even though this kind of rhetoric tends to be far more mediagenic.⁴⁴

In order to avoid becoming mediocre, a mean or political moderation should be active. Especially at the time of intense extremisms, we need, in every respect, an active mean, moderate political forces capable of opposing extremisms. Nevertheless, in all spheres of life, especially in political life, a mean or moderation is very difficult to achieve and maintain. To find and maintain it, owing to the existence of extremisms, we need more than theoretical reflection on it. What is necessary is political disputation, difficult to start and carry out, in the midst of the spectrum of political forces. Any extremism is a challenge to fight in the first place, but for democrats it denotes different means than those that extremists use.

Evaluations of Extremism

The phenomenon, called extremism since the mid-nineteenth century, is as old as political history, both in the sphere of its thought and practice. In all epochs of human history there were initiatives that, having come from the periphery of social life, which accurately renders the essence of extremism, were aimed against social institutions and political structures situated in the centre of social order and in the centre of political order.

Scientific interest in the phenomenon of extremism came even later than its name. Despite some proposals, a separate discipline has not emerged, and we do not know whether it will, whose exclusive subject would be extremism. It should be admitted that the subject is as much vast as difficult to explain, requiring reference to many social sciences, especially history, sociology, psychology, jurisprudence, cultural studies and political science. The reason why knowledge about political extremism, like about religious extremism, is underdeveloped, can be partly accounted for by prevalence among its interpretations of the normative theory of extremism, which is incapable of embracing its complex character.

Interesting and still unexplored questions pertaining to extremism include comparative studies of its forms of thinking and practice. Especially important would be thorough-going comparative studies of left-wing and right-wing extremism and their relations to other orientations positioned on the two constituents of the axis, left and right of the mean or centre. Studies of left-wing extremism were dominated by criticism of and hostility to capitalism, leaving the other sides of this brand of extremism neglected. Furthermore, this criticism and hostility towards capitalism, recognized as determinants of left-wing extremism, do not render its specificity insofar as it is not the only criticism and enemy of capitalism. As compared with left-wing extremism, right-wing extremism is more homogeneous and, moreover, antidemocratic in its self-

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 10 et seq.

identification. Studies of right-wing extremism are further advanced because it did not experience a historical trauma that left-wing extremism suffered with the collapse of the socialist system after 1989.

Studies into right-wing and left-wing extremism are based chiefly on reference to the theoretical model of democracy despite the fact that the substance of both goes far beyond this model. Areas that merit research interest comprise not only antidemocratism of the two brands of extremism, or only anti-egalitarianism of right-wing extremism and anti-capitalism of left-wing extremism. Examination of the practical aspects of extremisms indispensably requires deeper knowledge of their causes, conditions of continued life and of the force of influence. Therefore, social sciences, mainly political science, should not confine the scope of their research interests to studying extremist movements aimed against the democratic law-governed state.

A legalistic evaluation of extremist activities is found in US provisions relating to labour relations. They stipulate that participation in such activities is inconsistent with Army values and responsibilities of federal government employees. The law defines „extremist organizations and activities as ones that: a) advocate racial, gender, or ethnic hatred or intolerance; b) advocate, create or engage in illegal discrimination based on race, colour, gender, religion, physical/mental disability, age, national origin; or c) advocate the use of or use force or violence or unlawful means to deprive individuals of their rights under the United States Constitution or the laws of the United States, or any state, by unlawful means.”

American federal provisions concerning labour relations prohibit: „(1) Sponsoring or publicizing an extremist demonstration or rally; (2) Knowingly attending a meeting or activity while on duty or otherwise appearing to represent the Army or the Government; (3) Conducting fund-raising activities; (4) Recruiting or training members of an extremist group; (5) Organizing or leading such a group; (6) Distributing or posting literature; (7) Participating in any activity that is in violation of regulations, constitutes a breach of law and order, or is likely to result in violence.”⁴⁵

Of interest are presumptions of extremist activities found in the regulations concerning vehicle stops by American law enforcement officers. The signs of the driver's possible involvement in extremist groups include: a/ Vehicle displays bumper stickers with anti-government or pro-gun sentiments; b/ Licence plates are missing, are home-made (crude or professional), or are from jurisdictions that do not exist (Kingdom of Heaven, Republic of Texas etc; c/ Driver possesses home-made driving-licence; d/ Driver possesses no licence, vehicle registration, proof of insurance or other identification; e/ Instead, driver hands officer a copy of the Constitution, Bible, Koran or political literature; f/ Driver refuses to satisfy minor outstanding warrants due to anti-government

⁴⁵ *Category: Management – Employee Relations Program. Extremist Activities*, <http://www.cpol.army.mil/permiss/5911.html>

beliefs; g/ Driver was identified as associating with known extremists.⁴⁶ American police also have mile-long lists of extremist and terrorist groups.⁴⁷

In keeping with the cultural climate of our times, the links between extremist groups and the Internet are also being identified. Certainly, there is an established opinion that the Internet can be, to a decisive extent, an instrument conducive to spreading that which is good and useful. Every day, every minute, the Internet remains an huge reservoir of information. However, the same Internet can, through unlawful and inappropriate use, be an instrument of evil, including different kinds of extremism. One of the Internet pages lists types of extremism that can be propagated through it: political fascism, white supremacy, Holocaust denial, religious cults, Islamic militancy, anti-homosexuality, anti-abortionism, pro-anorexia and pro-bulimia, sports hooliganism, bomb-making (weapon-making) information, suicide assistance, celebration of criminality or perversion (schlock sites).⁴⁸

Apart from those who urge that the problems of extremism be the subject matter of a separate discipline, there are also those who, like Steven Dutch, University of Wisconsin professor, warn against the adverse effects of the pseudo-scientific nature of extremism. S. Dutch contrasts the domain of social sciences and politics with intellectual counterculture, where he assigns a prominent place to inter alia political extremism. He reminds us that political extremism produces highly dangerous conceptions like fascism, anarchism, and communism. He explains that political extremism, as a factor of counterculture, promotes pseudo-science that rejects scientific findings. Pseudo-science of political extremism lies in the belief in false and extremely improbable scientific theories: a/ without adequate supporting evidence, b/usually with demonstrably false logic, and c/ in open defiance of scientific consensus.⁴⁹

A similar assessment of extremism, this time as a profile of the extremist, was offered by Ortega y Gasset. He maintains that an extremist is „a born falsifier”, someone who substitutes exaggeration for creativity and ingenuity. Exaggeration is the opposite of creation, it defines inertia. Extremists always represent the inertia of their age. A creative man knows limitations of original truth, and exactly for that reason he always remains on alert, ready to abandon it the moment truth begins to transform itself into falsity.⁵⁰ The interpreter of Ortega added that the intellectual extremist feeds on stealing other people's ideas and presents them in a distorted form as novelty. His originality consists

⁴⁶ J. Kobolt: *Vehicle stops involving extremist group members*, FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin, December 1999, Washington DC.

⁴⁷ For example *Police K9 Homepage*, *Southwind kennels*, *Extremist Groups* contains names of hundreds of such groups associated with the Ku Klux Klan, Neo-Nazi, Skinhead, Christina Identity, or Black Separatist movements, <http://www.pk9.com/intel/ext.html>

⁴⁸ Extremism on the Net, <http://www.rogerdarlington.co.uk/extremismonthenet.html>; for more see a monographic study by D. J. Atkin: *The Regulation of Political Extremism on Cable Access*, Carbondale, Il. 1989.

⁴⁹ S. Dutch: *Beware of the Pseudoscientist*, <http://www.uwgb.edu/dutchs/acstalks/acs-psci.htm>.

⁵⁰ J. Ortega y Gasset: *Revés de Almanague* (1930) in: *Obras*, Madrid 1932, p. 742.

mainly in the noise, in decibels, in the use of pompous words, while the consequences of such intemperate vocabulary, which the extremist finds out too late, go beyond his intentions and often run counter to them.⁵¹

Roman Tokarczyk

Streszczenie

Przyjęte tutaj założenia badawcze mają na celu ukazanie w sposób syntetyczny najważniejszych elementów tworzących wspólną problematykę ekstremizmu w ogóle, ze szczególnym jednak uwzględnieniem teoretycznej i praktycznej istoty współczesnego ekstremizmu politycznego. Tego rodzaju założenia badawcze na plan pierwszy wysuwają problemy pojęciowe, definicyjne, źródłowe, typologiczne, metodologiczne, komparatystyczne, koncepcyjne i ocenne. Ogólność, a nawet ogólnikowość, rozważań, warunkowana ograniczoną objętością niniejszego tekstu, zmusza wręcz autora do unikania opisów rzeczywistych przejawów niezliczonych form ekstremizmu.

Istniejąca już literatura naukowa poświęcona ekstremizmowi politycznemu, mimo że przytłacza swym ogromem, rozczarowuje skromnymi wynikami badań. Ekstremizm w ogóle, jako taki, czyli syntetyczny przekrój istoty wszystkich form ekstremizmu, tylko niekiedy staje się przedmiotem badań naukowych. Może to wynikać z tego, że badania w tym zakresie zostały zdominowane zainteresowaniami głównie ekstremizmem politycznym, przez co nabrały charakteru jednowymiarowości poznawczej, niezdolnej do ogarnięcia wielowymiarowości kompleksowego zjawiska przenikającego całą rzeczywistość społeczną, jakim pozostaje ekstremizm w różnych jego formach. Wielowymiarowa, systematyczna analiza ekstremizmu, jako takiego, wymaga definiowania i typologii jego form, wyjaśniania ich powiązań, określania różnic, podobieństw i tożsamości.

Nawet jednakże wyniki badań nad samym ekstremizmem politycznym nie mogą imponować. Najczęściej bowiem polegają one na stwierdzeniach, że ekstremizm polityczny jest antydemokratyczny, dogmatyczny, fundamentalistyczny, represywny, terrorystyczny, etc., a więc wskazują na cechy zakładane już na samym wstępie owych badań. Próby wychodzenia poza jednowymiarowość poznawczą ekstremizmu politycznego ku jakiejś poznawczej wielowymiarowości ekstremizmu, jako takiego, napotykają na zasadniczą trudność skonstruowania adekwatnej do tego koncepcji. W rezultacie ograniczenia zakresu badań do ekstremizmu politycznego, dotychczasowa literatura naukowa koncentruje się na tych jego przejawach, które są redukowane do skrajnych form sprzeciwu wobec demokratycznego państwa prawnego, jako normy ustrojowo-konstytucyjnej usytuowanej pośrodku spektrum państwowych form ustrojowych.

⁵¹ Sartori: *Teoria demokracji*, op. cit., p. 616.

Normatywna interpretacja ekstremizmu politycznego, redukująca jego najgłębszy sens do skrajnych form sprzeciwu wobec demokratycznego państwa prawnego, odsłania dopiero rozległe obszary wątpliwości, ale jeszcze ich nie wyjaśnia. Przede wszystkim nasuwa się zasadnicze pytanie, czy istnieje merytoryczny związek między celami i metodami? Czy niedemokratyczne środki, po które sięga ekstremizm polityczny, muszą być koniecznie sprzężone z niedemokratycznymi celami? A może istnieją cele demokratyczne, które są, albo nawet powinny, być osiągane środkami niedemokratycznymi? Czy wszystkie, określane jako ekstremistyczne, grupy zmagają się do niedemokratycznych celów, czy też posługują się jedynie niedemokratycznymi środkami? Czy cel staje się niedemokratyczny przez to, że ma być osiągnięty niedemokratycznymi środkami? Pytania te oczekują na uzasadnione odpowiedzi.

Filozoficzne interpretacje ekstremizmu, sięgając swymi starożytnymi początkami pomysłów Arystotelesa, są wielce pomocne przy oświetleniu współczesnego ekstremizmu politycznego, zarówno prawicowego, jak i lewicowego. Dotychczasowe wyniki badań naukowych nad głównymi formami ekstremizmu politycznego, często plątanymi z formami radykalizmu politycznego – prawicowymi i lewicowymi – są zróżnicowane i tylko niekiedy łączone z ogólnym pojęciem ekstremizmu. Znaczące wyniki badań odnoszą się do współczesnego ekstremizmu prawicowego, natomiast są one mizerne w zakresie wyjaśniania współczesnego ekstremizmu lewicowego. Wynika to przede wszystkim z istotnej transformacji myśli, ruchów, partii, państw i środków działania określanym wspólnym mianem ekstremizm lewicowy, po załamaniu się systemu państw socjalistycznych, datowanym na ogół od 1989 roku. Przeto, stosowanie, po tym załamaniu się, takich samych ogólnych nazw na określenie fenomenów ekstremizmu lewicowego jak przed tym załamaniem się nie wspomaga rozwoju badań nad nim, ale wręcz je blokuje. Za duży sukces badawczy należałoby już uznawać klarowne oddzielenie od siebie tego, co w ekstremizmie lewicowym anarchistyczne, komunistyczne, socjalistyczne, socjaldemokratyczne, autonomiczne, protestacyjne, kontestacyjne i terrorystyczne.

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