

# *The idea and practice of radicalism: Comments on Grażyna Żurkowska's concept*

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# C O L L E G I U M   C I V I T A S

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# The idea and practice of radicalism: Comments on Grażyna Żurkowska's concept

Mikołaj Rakusa-Suszczewski

## Abstract

Sociological interpretations of the processes of “radicalization” should take into account the complex and interdisciplinary nature of the phenomenon of “radicalism” itself. This article illustrates some of the intricacies involved here. Radicalism is an intellectual and philosophical attitude that reaches the roots [radix] of things, and thus is supposed to enable a more thorough understanding and transformation of reality. In this form, radicalism was for some the embodiment of humanism and progressiveness, for others it led to “spiritual intoxication.” Still others saw in it a neutral attitude of quasi-religious prophetism. In psychological interpretations, radicalism had its roots in the depths of the human psyche. It was interpreted as an expression of infantile emotionality, resentment or neurasthenia, it was associated with repressed needs, madness, conspiracy thinking or hatred. Interpreted as a culturally and historically relative phenomenon, radicalism reflects the power of hegemonic ideas and the phenomenon of specific public spheres. From this perspective, it has been interpreted as an expression of the democratic culture of narcissistic individualism, the progress of liberal democracies, left-wing revolutionary movements and reactionary right-wing movements, as well as a strictly modern phenomenon. As a social phenomenon, radicalism has been interpreted in numerous ways, especially in the sociology of social movements. An original contribution to its understanding was made by the ahistorical anthropology of the Polish philosopher Grażyna Żurkowska, whose concept is discussed in the main part of this article.

## Keywords

radicalization, radicalism, Grażyna Żurkowska, “radical man,” modernity, “democratic radicalism”

“The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways;  
the point is to change it”. (Marx 1998: 574)

## Introduction

What does radicalism mean today? How should we understand this slightly “baroque” and ambiguous notion, which concerns both a certain intellectual attitude and culturally and historically determined social practices? These orders cannot and do not mean something completely different, which is why considerations on this subject are always interdisciplinary. Radicalism is a problem for philosophical anthropology and psychology as much as it is for political philosophy and sociology. Ideas about radicalism are historical: they are part of our knowledge and experiences that change and constantly modify our sensitivity. Thus, its understanding is partly conventional and, as a result, also contentious. However, radicalism is also interpreted substantially as a manifestation of permanent human needs and characteristics. This ambiguity applies to many categories we use on a daily basis and inevitably forces us to constantly reinterpret them.

In Poland, this issue has been dealt with by, among others, the late philosopher Grażyna Żurkowska, who was associated with the University of Rzeszów from 2008 until the end of her life. Referring to her original concept and language, stemming from the tradition of speculative realism, in particular, based on her posthumously published collection *Horyzonty filozofii radykalnej* [*Horizons of Radical Philosophy*], I would like to discuss this intricate topic and supplement it with her interesting reflections on social radicalism (Żurkowska 2015).

Żurkowska’s work contains a belief, which I share, that radicalism is transgressive in nature, expresses the work of thought and imagination as well as a longing for truth and inquisitiveness, and is also a source of

constant tension, anxiety, idealism and hope (Rakusa-Suszczewski 2016). Jacques Ellul would describe this interpretation as “hot,” that is, one that exposes emotions: a tragic, romantic and obscured dimension of radicalism that is revealed more in processes than in specific attitudes or doctrines (Ellul 1971: 299-300). I agree with Żurkowska when she argues that metaphysical radicalism can have a measurable and positive impact on politics and the public sphere. Therefore, her interpretation is the direct opposite of these – in my opinion, conservative and fear-filled – opinions which see radicalism as mere manifestations of pathology and dysfunction.

### Referents

Radicalism is a term too often equated with fundamentalism, extremism, militant religious orthodoxy, and other threats to the status quo. It is also hastily identified with a revolution, which is most often only a materialized shallowed form of radicalism. All too seldom, however, the sources of radicalism are sought in the modern effort to redefine and, in fact, dethrone the dogmatic concept of nature. In this process, a significant role was played by the Enlightenment's liberal philosophy of freedom, as well as the new nature of public opinion, to the development of which this philosophy unconditionally contributed. Radicalism is subject to various interpretative trends, which are outlined here in a necessarily simplified form. Such an introduction also makes it possible to place the thinker's concepts better on the conceptual horizon.

Firstly, there is a trend in which radicalism manifests itself as an intellectual and philosophical attitude; the spiritual form of a subject's life and the way this person manifests themselves or is in the world. Here, radicalism expresses a passionate but uneasy need to discover the very foundations of human life – its roots [*radix*]. Radicalism, in thinking about and cognition of the world, comes down to what Gaston Bachelard refers to as an “epistemological rupture” [Fr. *rupture épistémologique*]

and what can be considered the essence of radical thinking, intellectual or philosophical radicalism in general (cited by Keucheyan 2010). Radicalism expresses disagreement with what is and demands an alternative description of reality, in terms that are extremely different from those commonly accepted, to understand this reality more thoroughly. Walter Benjamin calls these radical categories “extreme types” [Ger. *extreme typen*] and their use makes it possible to better see the roots of human life.

Helmuth Plessner in his book entitled *The Limits of Community: A Critique of Social Radicalism* presents a unique analysis of the radical “state of the soul,” whose axiological rigorism he basically considers dangerous for man and social life (Plessner 1999). Radicalism, he argues, leads to a constant tear resulting from the lack of acceptance for the existing state of affairs and the need to affirm the “invisible community.” Regardless of whether it is “blood radicalism” (right-wing) or “matter radicalism” (left-wing), it is always a form of “spiritual poisoning.”

In his book entitled *Reveille for Radicals*, Saul Alinsky, an outstanding American social activist and spiritual leader of counter-cultural movements, portrays a radical differently. A radical is a reformer and a humanist who anticipates a better world. Alinsky also characterizes such a person as an altruist who defends the human soul by fighting the evils of this world: wars, fear, poverty, as well as mindless and dehumanizing rationalization. They are not deceived by appearances and always look for the most important things – the very essence of problems. This expresses their sincerity and a kind of “youth” – courage, simplicity and naivety. As Alinsky argues, a radical fights for freedom, not only political and economic but also social. Therefore, they strive for decent living conditions, human rights on an equal footing with minority rights, universal education and the value of work, social planning and self-organization (Alinsky 1946). Radicalism breaks with the privileges of a few, all casteism, as well as hypocrisy, so characteristic – as he argues – of liberals. Saul Alinsky gives the example of radicalism understood as a

left-wing attitude, which is still present today (especially in the culture of English-speaking countries).

In his attempt to conceptualize radicalism, Egon Bittner sees in it, above all, a reflective and prophetic attitude (Bittner 1963). Dislike for routine and the need for critical revision of common-sense perceptions, so characteristic of radicals, are only shared by a few who can bear the burden of arguing about history, which Bittner refers to as “radical historiosophy.” Because radicalism is characterized by uncompromising prophetism, it also has a quasi-religious character. However, it inevitably leads to a certain paradox: confrontation with the rules governing the public sphere transforms it into schematic rigour and strengthens extremist elements. Purism becomes a form of defense against heterogeneous reality but it also undermines the very flexible essence of radicalism. In another analysis, Bittner also emphasizes that radicalism has its value-rational functionality and cannot be reduced to only emotional states, as interpreted by, for example, Theodor Adorno. Radical ideology is born on the margins of social life, which makes it associated with social movements (Bittner 1968: 294-295).

In the latest edition of the *Macmillan Encyclopedia*, Tormey argues that radicalism can only be understood in a particular cultural and historical context (Tormey 2008, pp. 48-51). What appears to be radical in one place and time ceases to be so in another. As a result, radicalism is devoid of all substance. At the same time, the author introduces an interesting distinction between modern and postmodern forms of radicalism, which nevertheless suggests a kind of reflective and moral attitude of a radical towards the world. While the first kind of radicalism is characterized by certainty and belief in a better world, the latter is mired in skepticism. The abandonment or loss of this certainty deprives contemporary radicalism of its social power to transform the world, and is more a source of anxiety and melancholy.

In his monograph *Radicalism: A Philosophical Study*, Paul McLaughlin illustrates radicalism, above all, as a category of political thought and

even of philosophical-political thought (McLaughlin 2012). To this end, the author performs a semantic analysis of the concept (its connotations, etymology and history) and then describes the main trends in political thought referring to the tradition of radicalism. At the same time, he poses a number of important questions and also tries to find in the pluralism of its numerous political figures a specific ahistorical essence in humanism and attachment to the idea of progress. This interpretation can also be seen as an attempt at a substantial approach to the issue of radicalism.

The second fundamental trend, which continues to affect the way of thinking about radicalism, refers to psychological categories and the belief that human actions have their source in the dark layers of the psyche, as inaccessible and invisible as the very roots. James E. Shea introduces perhaps one of the first psychological conceptualizations of radicalism as a broader attitude towards life (Shea 1906). He distinguishes between old and new radicalism. The former is characterized by principle and unambiguity, the latter by a feverish vision of development, devoid of idealism and focused on style. Shea claims that the new radicalism has the nature of a child, and its sources come from infantile emotionality and irrational experiences.

What ultimately determines radicalism is the adaptation to stimuli associated with “reinforcement” – as Albert Wolfe explains in the language of psychoanalysis. Neither “transference” and “substitution” nor “repression” and “suppression” allow true and lasting radicalism to emerge. Wolfe argues that radicalism, which emerges as a response to stimuli and obstacles, and which can generate a social movement capable of real reformist actions, can only be born through reinforcement. It is therefore a feature of only a few who, like intellectuals and scientists, can additionally be stimulated by other stimuli, such as: curiosity, inquisitiveness, ingenuity, ambition, the need for social innovation, competition or self-expression. In other words, radicalism springs from both

psychological anxiety and the need to reconstruct the world rooted in psychological needs (Wolfe 1921: 295).

The concept of radicalism as interpreted by Thomas William Root is conventional and depends on the context. Radicalism overwhelms those who challenge traditional social imaginings and disrupts the comforts of conventional life (Root 1925: 341). It is in the collision with the public sphere that a radical becomes emotionally unstable, developing disorders and illnesses. Root argues, however, that a radical is not a neurasthenic, yet they often turn into an aggressive-assertive egoist due to their simultaneous superiority and inferiority complex. According to Root, such features are usually attributed to the so-called intelligentsia, as well as Jewish and proletarian intellectuals. In fact, radicalism is a product of the tension between the social majority and the few whose views can be left-wing or right-wing. However, a negative attitude towards radicalism is unfair, according to Root, who sees predilections in it for creative, innovative and noble activities.

Elary Francis Reed sees in radicalism, above all, the irrational and unreflective passions of the “popular mind” (Reed 1926: 38). The author looks for sources in the transfer of affects related to blocked emotions, defense mechanisms, the need for compensation and self-purification, in a strong identification with people in difficult situations, but also in moral motives, which makes radicalism rational.

The quoted texts from the beginning of twentieth the century testify not only to the growing interest in psychological interpretations that could explain individual and social actions of people but also to the growing conviction about the irrational nature of the forces that drive social processes. Psychological research has largely enabled the interpretation of phenomena such as radicalism and related ones as something that eludes political pragmatics and is incompatible with reason and therefore dangerous.

It is in this spirit that Horace Kallen defines the concept of radicalism. While radicalism was originally supposed to provide impulses for institutional change and its original message was democratic, humanitarian and peaceful, radicalization contemporary to the author is based on complex and destructive complexes: hatred and a sense of injustice (Kallen 1934: 51-54). In fact, radicalism began to manifest itself more in the sphere of behavior than reflection. This kind of fever and resentment was to characterize completely different ideologies in equal measure, and the word “radical” became the “bad name” of a disturbing imbalance.

A very significant example of such a psychological approach was research on right-wing authoritarianism, which is often identified with radicalism to this day. Of particular importance in this area is the research by Theodor Adorno et al. described in their famous book entitled *The Authoritarian Personality* (Adorno et al. 1950). Among the publications highlighting the psychological problems of both left- and right-wing radicalisms, the book entitled *The Rise of Radicalism* by Eugene H. Methvin is noteworthy. The author attributes madness, hatred, conspiracy thinking and a tendency to tyranny to all forms of political radicalism (Methvin 1973). He places the greatest tyrants of modern history in the gallery of radicals. In the stereotypical image of radicalism, violence is intertwined with cataclysm, and, using the language of psychoanalysis, the source ultimately turns out to be difficulties during their upbringing and conflicts with their father. Methvin’s book is one of many commentaries marked by the trauma of war and the fear of new waves of extremism and violence.

Among the outstanding research in this period, the work entitled *Roots of Radicalism* by the sociologists Rothman and Lichter (1982) deserves attention. In this book, they reflect on the phenomenon of the American and European (particularly German) student movements and the new left. The analysis of these American researchers stems from

psychoanalysis, ego psychology and the so-called object relations theory. Their research subject is the cultural, social and political changes (related to the development of the civil rights movement and the Vietnam War, among others), which underlie a serious ideological crisis in America. A characteristic feature of this publication is that it emphasizes the key role of the Jewish minority (ethnic and religious) and its specifically “marginal” position in the social structure and dislike for the oppressive establishment. The authors argue that the changes that occurred created a special generational climate for expressing hitherto hidden fantasies, usually subjected to control and repression in the multidimensional system of “bourgeois” education formatting the so-called superego.

In fact, they argue that the roots of radicalism lie in the dissemination of a democratic culture of narcissistic individualism that rejects traditional principles in favor of the uninhibited development of the ego. The basic consequence of this process associated with radicalization is the diminishing human ability to sublimate erotic drives and aggression, and thus the gradual destruction of the entire system of meanings created by culture. The gradual radicalization that the authors associate with the New Left movement involves, above all, a growing dilemma between the need for power and gratification and the fear of losing control; a search for autonomy and a dream of losing oneself in some new sense-creating order (this is especially true of radicals of non-Jewish origin).

In the third trend, radicalism is embodied by a reformist political stance, which explains its enlightening nature. The most important intellectual contribution to the dissemination of the concept of radicalism as a liberal and democratic attitude was made by the English Whigs in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Among them, the most recognized and well-known originator of the rationalization of the political system is Jeremy Bentham, author of the political pamphlet entitled *Radicalism not Dangerous* (Bentham 1843). In his book, the phi-

osopher is critical of the common and insulting opinions about radicalism as the source of all evil, absurd and “rogue” ideas, as well as apparent and destructive machinations, which the English public, impressed by the bloody Revolution in France, was then inclined to attribute to English radicals. Meanwhile, radicalism is, in his opinion, the only remedy for overcoming real pathologies and social injustices. It is therefore synonymous with a real and necessary socio-political and moral transformation adapted to the elementary features of human nature.

In his political project, progressive changes were to be associated in particular with the fundamental reform of the electoral system involving the introduction of annual, equal, general and secret elections. Some of Bentham’s ideas were known to the public from his earlier publications (for example, *Plan of Parliamentary Reform*), referring to the writings of John Cartwright, which have been meticulously described by Élie Halévy (1995), among others. What remains most important for us, however, is that Bentham identifies radicalism with peaceful reform.

In 1844, in his *Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Right*, Karl Marx opposes a reformist and liberal interpretation of radicalism to a new, more categorical form of social criticism, whose proper and ultimate goal is a revolution (Marx 1970). The approaches of Bentham and Marx define two basic strategies of radicalism, which, more simply, can be described as gentle and militant – Enlightenment and Romantic. Radicalism, which means an insight into the roots of things, that is, according to Marx, reaching into man themselves, indicates the necessity of an uncompromising fight against all attempts to subjugate or humiliate them.

Marx’s radicalism assumes the strong ideal of *non-mediation*, which has become characteristic of at least some left-wing projects of direct democracy, where this “reaching” is expressed in the need to empower participants of social life at any cost, even – somewhat symbolically – at the price of abolishing the “sacred institution of the family.”

It is no coincidence that in his book entitled *Eros and Civilization*, published in 1955, the New Left ideologue Herbert Marcuse sees the condition of “radical subjectivity” in sexual liberation (Marcuse 1955). Likewise, in her project of “radical ethics,” described in *A Radical Philosophy*, the outstanding neo-Marxist thinker Agnès Heller calls not only for individual care for one’s neighbor (seeking freedom, happiness and perfection) but also the ultimate abolition of any asymmetry in the public sphere resulting from the binding rules of obedience and submission (Heller 1984). According to Marx, radicalism is a project of the de-fetishization of human life, which involves freeing man from all unnecessary objects that hinder their contact with others and oneself.

In the opinion of the American sociologist and feminist Thelma McCormack, included in the article entitled “The Motivation of Radicals,” an honest reflection on radicalism completely disappeared in the post-war period (McCormack 1950). The title of the article could indicate a psychological interpretation but, in fact, it is a call for a more sociological approach despite the unjust and naive tendency to see radicalism only as personality disorders and a tendency to extremism – a call for abandoning Freud in favor of Marx. McCormack argues, citing research by Krout and Stagner and Theodore Newcomb, that those who question accepted norms do so depending on their place in the social structure, in relation to the objective historical situation, and also because of positive identification with selected values. Therefore, radicalism needs to be analyzed not in isolation, but in connection with the dynamics and direction of the development of social movements.

The concept of radicalism was first used in reference to right-wing political extremism by Seymour Lipset (1963). The terms “right-wing radicalism” and “populism” as interpreted by Richard Hofstadter increasingly dominated the academic world and the public as something threatening (Hofstadter 1955). As Lipset points out, the radicalism of McCarthyism was expressed not only in striving for far-reaching institutional changes but also in the desire to exclude from the system those

who threatened its values and interests. Lipset attributes the emergence of such right-wing radicalism to so-called status politics, distinguishing it from class politics. While the latter relates to interests and develops particularly in situations of economic instability as a need for reform, status politics emerges in times of prosperity, when frustration can grow due to a sense of an insufficiently strong economic or social position. This, in turn, leads to resentment and, consequently, to radicalism.

Among the works devoted to the issue of radicalism, attention should be paid to two collective works. Coming from Poland, Seweryn Bialer, together with Sophie Sluzar, edited one of the most interesting and extensive collections of texts devoted to this issue, entitled *Radicalism in the Contemporary Age*. Numerous articles by prominent intellectuals (including Nisbet, Kołakowski, Raskin and Brzeziński) reveal a complex image of radicalism that goes far beyond simply associating it with a left-wing attitude (Bialer, Sluzar (Eds.) 1977). This publication extensively discusses its numerous sources (Vol. I), visions of the future (Vol. II), as well as the strategies and influence of radicalism on both the spiritual condition of contemporary man and the political and social situation (Vol. III).

Jonathan Pugh has edited an equally ambitious and quite similar publication entitled *What is Radical Politics Today* (Pugh (Ed.) 2009). The book is a collection of different answers to the question of what constitutes radical politics. The authors of the collection (including Bauman, Furedi, Soja and Mouffe) present various visions of contemporary radical politics (Part I), new forms of radical politics (Part II), attitudes towards dissimilarities and differences (Part III), as well as visions of the state (Part IV) resulting from a radical attitude, here basically understood as a left-wing attitude.

The social sciences have done much to highlight the numerous interrelationships between the phenomenon of radicalism and social structure, class representation, political circumstances, culture (nationality), religion, race and even gender. These issues should not be overlooked.

Only the most important publications in English are presented here, with full and overwhelming awareness that the literature on the subject in other languages can be equally abundant.

Since at least the early 1960s, there has been a broader discussion about whether radicalism is a feature of excluded, discriminated groups living on the margins of the elite or rather a phenomenon that affects the middle class, with its appetites and aspirations. These are reflections on the determinants of the phenomenon of radicalism rather than an analysis of the concept, but they nevertheless raise important questions. Christopher Lasch states that radicalism is the work of intellectuals revolting against the middle class that produced them (Lasch 1967). Frank Parkin, in his analysis of the British anti-nuclear movement entitled *Middle Class Radicalism* (Parkin 1968), and Robert Johnston, in his book entitled *The Radical Middle Class* (Johnston 2003), place the sources of radicalism in the middle class itself.

Among the publications highlighting the structure of political circumstances, including the (cultural) determinants of radicalism, Colin J. Beck's book entitled *Radicals, Revolutionaries, and Terrorists* is worth attention. The author describes not only numerous connections between the title concepts, ways of organizing radical movements and the dynamics of their development, but also presents interesting thoughts on the concept of radicalism itself (Beck 2015).

Among the publications exposing the links between radicalism and religion, in addition to the above-mentioned book by Lichter and Rothman, there is there is a collection entitled *Faith-based Radicalism* edited by Christiane Timmerman et al. (2007). The issue of the relationship between race and radicalism is addressed by Abram Lincoln Harris in his book *Race, Radicalism, and Reform* (Harris 1989). There is a significant ambivalence in the way of presenting the gender of radicalism, which, when identified with violence, is one of the central themes of feminist criticism. Moreover, radicalism understood more

substantially grows to be the essential and characteristic feature of this criticism, from where, for example, the term “radical feminism” stems.

Finally, in this brief review of the referents of radicalism, it is worth addressing the three main types of social movement theories that have constantly accompanied reflection on radicalism. The first, which emerged in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and lasted until the 1960s, associates the concept of radicalism with the dysfunctions of mass society, the irrational violence of crowds and the unpredictability of marginalized groups. Noteworthy is the vast array of works ranging from *The Crowd: A Study of the Popular Mind* by Gustave Le Bon (1895), through books by collective behavior theorists such as *The True Believer* by Eric Hoffer (1951), *The Politics of Mass Society* by William Kornhauser (1959) and *Theory of Collective Behavior* by Neil Smelser (1962), to the texts by theoreticians of the so-called relative deprivation, such as *Why Man Rebel* by Ted Gurr (1962).

In the 1970s, an alternative concept of social movements emerged, which saw radicalism not as psychological dysfunctions, but as a result of rational actions related to fundamental socio-cultural and economic changes. Radicalism was interpreted here as a manifestation of the rational mobilization of social resources, that is, as a justified and organized reaction to the objective dysfunctions of social structures. Meyer Zald and John McCarthy, authors of the well-known article entitled “Resource Mobilization and Social Movements: A Partial Theory” (1977) play a significant role in the formation of this paradigm. In his book *From Mobilization to Revolution*, Charles Tilly (1978) contributes to the development of the theory of political circumstances, which emphasizes the importance of the context of social unrest, including the environment, for radicalism.

Finally, the 1980s and 1990s saw the emergence of a cultural paradigm of social movement studies that also opened up new perspectives in thinking about radicalism. The strategic importance of language and semantic structures is emphasized by representatives of

the ramification theory, such as William Gamson or David Snow, a co-author of the widely discussed publication entitled *Frame Alignment Processes, Micromobilization and Movement Participation* (1986). European researchers coined the concept of new social movements, emphasizing the struggle for identity in the discussion about radicalism. Alain Touraine, Alberto Melucci and Manuel Castells play an important role here. Cultural theories, exemplified by *The Passionate Politics*, turn to subjective needs, moral dilemmas and especially the emotions of social activists (Goodwin et al. 2001).

### Helplessness and agency

Not all of the works listed here provide a direct context for considering Grażyna Żurkowska's ideas, yet, nevertheless, they allow us to see the specificity of the unconventional way in which she understood and described radicalism, rooted in the philosophical tradition and social thought. Anthony Giddens writes about "radicalized modernity," in which the reconstruction of traditional ways of thinking becomes inevitable (increased "reflexivity"), at the same time forcing a constant reorganization of social life (Giddens 2008).

Although the concepts of a radical man and radicalism formulated by Żurkowska stem from philosophical anthropology and, in direct reference to the contemporary trend of so-called speculative realism, they actually reflect the strictly modern (historical) coercion and situation that Giddens writes about. Let us take a closer look at some of the philosopher's concepts and ideas.

The fundamental task of philosophy, although this general remark should be related to the attitude of man in general, that is, the essence of their humanity, is "... to transcend the patterns of helplessness created by tradition" (Żurkowska 2015: 47).<sup>1</sup> This is the source of scepticism, pessimism and also, as a result, nihilism and withering

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<sup>1</sup> All the quotes from Żurkowska's works in this article are author's own translations.

away. Żurkowska opposes patterns of helplessness to metaphors of agency that come from mutiny and rebellion, as well as radicalism (*Ibidem*: 47). Radicalism is supposed to awaken individuals from sleep and lead them out of the “darkness of the obvious” and passivity. Therefore, it assumes a substantial inclination to increased “reflexivity,” the immediate necessity of which was noticed by the aforementioned Giddens. We are all threatened by the dominant common ways of thinking and conformism, which is why every person should be constantly vigilant and betray the blocking patterns on a daily basis. Żurkowska argues that radical thinking is based on the constant betrayal of orthodoxy. As she writes: “... one cannot think without betraying” (*Ibidem*: 50). Elsewhere, in reference to Epicurus/Lucretius, she attributes this to man’s free will and imperative to constantly “deviate” from norms or rebel against them – “defy the father.”

What is the origin of this “orthodoxy,” which – according to Żurkowska – is also a sign of exhaustion? It primarily involves the practice of reducing what is *real* to what is *theoretical*, in other words, identifying the synthetic constructions made by the subject of cognition (“theorized reality”) with reality itself (*Ibidem*: 118). In the spirit of speculative realism, she claims that cognitive accessibility cannot be the criterion of reality since the world constantly eludes theoretical points of view and cannot be “appropriated” (*Ibidem*: 51). According to the philosopher, this means that the existence of the Cartesian subject of cognition is a myth, and the source of harmful orthodoxy is what she describes as the “Cartesian effect.”

Radical thinking is supposed to make it possible to get out of this Cartesian trap of isomorphism (correlationism) and gain access to a world that is not a construction of the subject. This usually happens when confronted with “difficult” or borderline situations. Żurkowska writes:

“When our search comes to an end, when it ends in a wall, we do not automatically find a new solution; we do not jump straight to the other side, where everything immediately falls into place. Before we even find it, we have to

wander and speculate for a long time. Where are we then? After all, there is no doubt that we are somewhere, even though no theoretical orthodoxy is able to recognize it" (*Ibidem*: 59).

Radicalism and speculation force us to "retreat" from the position of the existing and available ways of knowing and reacting. Then we enter the "unknown," "untamed" and "sensed" (*Ibidem*: 59), the "element" and "precognitive vortex" (*Ibidem*: 119), the "ontic dimension of reality" (*Ibidem*: 123), or – using Kant's terminology – the "noumenal reality," "as such." "We think with the world" that we do not know and do not understand, about which we do not know, but which we must somehow speculatively take into account. This is the "perspective of radical metaphysical reflection" (*Ibidem*: 119). The radicalism assumed here is a mental process that releases a state of creative entanglement free from cognitive-discursive frameworks – free from theory.

Any traditional argumentative logic based on sequences limits the creative possibilities of thought, which requires momentum, freedom and the courage to go *beyond* and withdraw *beyond* (*Ibidem*: 61). Radicalism is therefore a step backwards in the hope of breaking the inevitability by, in an analogy with the biology of the body, moving back to the embryonic state "... in which nothing has yet been decided and so everything has become possible again" (*Ibidem*: 62). Withdrawal restores thought's lost power and energy, which is why philosophy needs renewal. From this manifesto emerges the image of a radical man (*Ibidem*: 129).

### A radical man

As has been said, the truth and the *real* that man wants to know are much more complex, and reaching these requires radical points of view and unpredictable treatments – disagreement with the existing framework. It can be said that the real subject is in a state of disequilibrium with the surrounding world, unlike, for example, an animal; the person constantly puts themselves to the test, expropriates

and strips themselves of certainty, contests and tests their capabilities, endurance, imagination and rationality. Radical anthropology precludes the existence of any end and final framework defined by God, fate, nature, society, family, culture, church, and so on. All these circumstances potentially deprive man of their freedom.

The radicalism imprinted in man's essence can protect what expresses their fragile essence: "incomplete," "leaky" and "perforated" – incomplete and living in "various plans" (*Ibidem*: 99). As Żurkowska writes, "(...) we brutally generalize by saying: man IS a social being, IS rational, IS moral, good, bad, religious, IS a subject. IS, IS, IS! And yet, there are so many dramas in this IS (...)" (*Ibidem*: 100). We do not have cognitive control over individual areas of our lives and subjectivity is constantly forced to "intervene" and redefine our situation. The purpose of this intervention is not entirely clear. It seems, however, that the intervention is to temporarily free man from the illusion of wholeness, order and security materialized in what the philosopher calls the *Real*.

Consequently, as Żurkowska writes, "A lack of security is the natural state of man" (*Ibidem*: 104). We are constantly confronted with something that surprises us. Attempts to tame this element, bring it to a standstill, get to know it and stop it at the same time mean that man loses the possibility of experiencing it in all its infinite complexity.

Radicalism does not have to denote anarchism and irresponsibility. Instead, it means a leap into the future and the unknown: "(...) it is the ability to invent a better world than the one that currently exists" (*Ibidem*: 69). It is synonymous with creative powers, against the perceived limit of possibilities; a form of human "redundancy" that is expressed in the social relations that man creates. Either we accept the blandness of the world, the ubiquitous triumph of incommensurability, fluidity and antinomies, or we transform them into a radically new quality (*Ibidem*: 73); we will radically rebuild our imagination, even if it means betraying our beliefs and anticipating a reality that currently seems absolutely unreal (*Ibidem*: 75). The contemporary world, writes

Żurkowska, needs radical subjects to break out of the state of permanent blandness (*Ibidem*: 110).

The progenitor of the “radical man” is the biblical Adam, who renounced eternal duration, the eternal here and now. The model of human subjectivity understood in this way expresses a state of hope-filled unfulfillment. Adam’s radicalism indicated a desire to be rooted in the world and take responsibility for it. In effect, however, man’s own inconsistency was discovered, which humanity decided to fight in the wrong way, assuming that cognition (cognitive relation) would keep everything under control, ensuring existential cohesion. Meanwhile, Żurkowska argues, “(...) man is a radically incoherent being” (*Ibidem*: 112). Man is a “composition of textures” and “(...) an entity that constantly eludes any generalization” (*Ibidem*: 113). Man acts in a situation of uncertainty, which is why risk and indefiniteness are part of their existence. It is only “striving” and “non-cognitive feeling” (*Ibidem*: 115) that temporarily pull the world out of its state of indefiniteness.

Human radicalism triggers utopian reasoning, however, not in the sense of thinking that does not take account of objective reality or accepted forms of rationality, but in the sense of “(...) the ability to break away from the place where one is rooted, from the accepted dictionary, language game, convention, consensus, theory ties and cultural frameworks” (*Ibidem*: 138). This is speculative and non-normative thinking, but also creative and progressive, which opens it up to the promptings of the liberated imagination. Utopian thinking makes it possible to approach reality and facts that often overwhelm man from an appropriate *distance*. We need thinking that frees us from topos, broadens our field of perception of the world, our field of “cognitive possibilities” and opens man to what is “undefined” (*Ibidem*: 141). “Each creative novelty – writes Żurkowska – functions beyond the control of the existing patterns, contrary to the accepted models of justification; when unattended” (*Ibidem*: 142).

The patterns about which the philosopher writes with disapproval are regulated by logical inevitability, linear lines of argument, conformism, pragmatism, realistic fields of rationality, systems, paradigms, territorial systems, institutionally recognized topos and conceptual spaces. Only breaking these gives hope because hope always appears beyond limits (*Ibidem*: 144). Żurkowska tries to turn this abstract and speculative thinking into a political stance – an originally described but, in fact, known form of direct democracy. Radicalism originates in a particular concept of the subject yet is materialized in the public and political sphere, in the “space of appearance” (Arendt 1998). Otherwise, it would have probably never been recognized.

### Democratic radicalism

How do these considerations about man and the radicalism inherent in humanity influence thinking about social life and politics? In the concept of “radically non-biological familiarity,” Żurkowska expresses her belief that people are not so much connected by genes or, more broadly, by some kind of determining kinship, but by common goals, aspirations and interests and, as a result, mutual trust and responsibility (Żurkowska 2015: 80). Perhaps she is a bit naive in believing that this extraterritorial environment of values makes it possible to avoid abuses resulting from the egoism and greed of closed groups that usually follow the logic of antagonism. Żurkowska further claims that the environment of properly understood radicalism is movement and changeability as well as a world that provides man with the opportunity to change identification and live in accordance with the previously described imperative to break and incline (*clinamen*). This environment is not so much a social group defined by a model (nation, church, society) but agreements (probably also short-term and unstable) spontaneously emerging from the need for community, in an analogous way – writes Żurkowska – as “religiousness” (as a spiritual disposition), according to

Eliade, predates a religious system. This is the only way to free man from a demanding attitude and develop a real sense of responsibility over narrowly defined models to which the “obedient man” (*homo oboediens*) is formatted. She points out that this is not about “civil society” because a “citizen” is also a political concept, but about broader communities of invention. I need to add that here I see various forms of social mobilization (including new social movements), which consolidate around common values, passions and ideas, and break the usual ways of thinking.

Żurkowska wonders why the word “radicalism” has acquired such a pejorative meaning today and why it has lost its power of ambition and anticipation of another world, its inquisitiveness and the need for completeness. According to the philosopher, there are several reasons for this pejoratization, such as the aggressive politicization of human life and its emphasis on objectivity, as well as the obsession with predictability, order and control (*Ibidem*: 77). Everything that betrays instrumental rationality is considered dangerous and irresponsible: belligerence and an expression of destructive and anti-social forces. Meanwhile, no sustainable social and moral models are able to capture the complex nature of how humans are rooted in the world.

Hence, Żurkowska's criticism of representative democracy, which usually no longer represents anyone. No one plans the future with proper and appropriate inquisitiveness anymore. We stand still and do not design tomorrow but only improve what is present. Żurkowska argues that the idea of representation should first be rethought; in particular, it should be expanded and depoliticized to make it more direct and shaped by those on whom “something depends,” who have a real impact on the shape of their lives. Hence, the slightly understated but inspiring idea of participation proportional to the state of being rooted in the world (“who does not participate – does not represent”). Perhaps the philosopher intended to give the right to representation

only to those who want to change the world. However, we do not know much about how this would look in practice.

The source of radical democracy is a single man, their personal strength and the need to mark their existence in the world, to turn the entire dispersed wealth of the soul into a causative act, which is also a moment of overcoming one's own individuality. Thus, radicalism expresses "the inner art of liberating, intensifying and expanding one's own agency" (*Ibidem*: 83). If politics has any meaning and value, it is precisely in the area of "co-releasing one's own power," overcoming the state of radical indeterminacy, uncertainty and indecision, as well as shaping the world.

Radicalism makes it possible to turn the "pre-axiological intuition of the democratic" into action, that is, the intuition of the existence of the infinite complexity of different attitudes and life powers as well as various models of agency, or, as Hannah Arendt puts it, the intuition of "human plurality." As Żurkowska writes: "Being a causative subject requires unlimited courage and reflectiveness" (*Ibidem*: 84). Żurkowska touches upon a significant problem, which is not the limitation of freedom, but the atrophy of causative powers, the depletion and waste of creative energies. The radical democracy she has in mind rejects both sociological preoccupations with macrostructures and philosophical obsessions with the subject. In search of an answer to this atrophy, her attention is drawn to the "microstructure of personal creativity," that is, the art of creating oneself and one's own world. As she claims: "only agency makes living beings real subjects" (*Ibidem*: 85). Traditionally, democracy is concerned with the issue of exercising power, while radical democracy focuses on the release of individual agency, the conditions that enable the subject to actually create and actualize oneself.

This potential of agency and the intuition of "the democratic" is manifested in the constant experience of a collision between the spirit, what is imagined and wanted by man, and reality, and therefore between what is immanent and anticipated and what has already

materialized in various forms of human agency. Radicalism thus presupposes a kind of “insatiability” and uncertainty, wandering and groping. This existential state, for which Żurkowska looks for references, for example, in Žižek’s conceptions (“proletarian subject”), this all-human imperative to create and formulate ambitions and hopes, is blocked by the all-encompassing economization of the world, which has made “having” (and not “being”) the primary goal of man. Thus, one of the basic problems preventing the expression of radicalism is also capitalism, with its imperative to accumulate property, gain profit and to consume. This causes frustration and negative communities, as well as the typical emotions of hatred, anger and bitterness (*Ibidem*: 88). Therefore, true radicalism can only develop in a world of “post-property,” which will establish “subjective responsibility” in people despite modern processes that increasingly subordinate them to superior macrostructures administered, controlled and regulated by various forms of power.

The excessive proceduralization, technologization and standardization of life are further and fundamental problems that block human invention and agency. These have dire consequences: incapacitation, a loss of a sense of belonging, civic passivity and consumerism understood in a broad sense, which expresses the common culture of treating everything as an object. After all, radical democracy cannot come to fruition because of traditional political philosophy, which, following the example of epistemology, has always attributed agency and causality to one entity (God, nature, society, the power of the subject of cognition) and thus has always reproduced structures of subordination (*Ibidem*: 91).

Żurkowska claims, in line with Kant, that democracy begins with individual commitment and moral responsibility; it begins with “coming out of culpable unproductivity” (*Sloterdijk*) and passivity. Man must therefore find authority, power and strength within themselves, not in claims to external authority. In her opinion, the role of any form of

power seems destructive. Żurkowska's extreme immanentism and subjectivism make her see a revolutionary and radical force in every human being. "In a radical democracy," writes Żurkowska, "only what inspires, broadens and enriches the boundaries of my presence in the world is of value" (*Ibidem*: 96). The "formative ideas" that a radical man creates in order to break with the inevitable power of patterns require "insolence" (*Ibidem*: 149), and their effectiveness can only be materialized when they are forged into action, experiments and progressive utopias. Hence, the philosopher formulates the apology of practical reason and perfectionism. Perhaps, however, contrary to reactionary thinking and attitudes, radicalism is no longer possible at all these days.

To sum up, the concepts of the Polish philosopher can sometimes seem rushed and unfinished. In many places, she complains aptly, yet somewhat stereotypically, about modern rationalism and capitalism, the disastrous economization of life, excessive politicization and the twilight of representative democracy. In sophisticated words, she formulates a slightly exaggerated belief in human creativity and individual powers, always projecting the somewhat aristocratic inclinations of a philosopher onto all people. Her dislike for theories ("theorized realities") may seem exaggerated and too hasty; although they do not set the limits of understanding the world, at the same time they always bring it closer and clarify it. Her speculative concept of the *real* as a "vortex" or "element" that is available to man in a non-theoretical way, in intuitions and through action, remains somewhat enigmatic.

In her philosophical anthropology, some similarities can be seen with Arendt, for whom the essence of human life is "setting in motion," "giving birth" (Arendt 1998: 177-178) and "unexpected action" (*Ibidem*: 178). A radical man is *homo faber* – a creative and acting man, who is thus in collision with reality, which constantly solidifies, hinders but also ultimately succumbs to human creativity. The concept of

participatory representation is intriguing rather than making it possible to imagine any just institutional solutions. We do not learn how and why to reconcile the idea of man rooted in the *real* with the need for uprooted utopian thinking.

Grażyna Żurkowska's concept is at the same time attractive, sometimes suggestive and beautifully "wrapped" in new, necessary concepts and words. It is a brave (radical) attempt to speak one's own language, rarely seen in Poland, and to construct an original philosophical concept encompassing the vision of the subject and their socio-political activity. Above all, it is an attempt to break with the stereotypical understanding of radicalism, whose existential, philosophical and social meanings are too often superficially interpreted or ignored. The above review of various ways of understanding radicalism makes it possible to better locate the thoughts of the Polish philosopher and see in her efforts a universal longing for radically new spiritual and social perspectives.

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About the book "The Virus of Radicalization":

"I regard this monograph as an example of high-quality academic craftsmanship. It is an important supplement to the literature on the phenomena and processes of radicalization and extremism (primarily those taking place in the Polish socio-political system, but not only). It will be interesting both for scientists, students and a wider audience interested in socio-political issues."

Associate Professor Mikołaj Cześnik, Ph.D., SWPS University of Social Sciences and Humanities, Warsaw, Poland

"The volume is a collection of chapters on the topic of mostly right-wing political radicalization in Poland, Europe, and the world. (...) Excellent empirical case studies of particular cases of political radicalization in Poland and Europe are the bulk and the highlight of the volume. (...) Overall, the volume is a useful, well-written and well-conceived contribution to literature on political radicalism and crisis of liberal democracy."

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