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Iulian GRIGORIU¹

Abstract

In this paper I discuss the concept of social asymmetry as a relation between the individual and society, but also as an intrinsic characteristic of society. I intend to analyze the relevance of the term to the fields of political science (descriptive, factually committed) and to political philosophy (normative, concerned with the difference between individuals with different values and options, the way in which factuality is regulated by the type of society). The term social asymmetry may be relevant in social ethics, as dependent on factors such as justice, freedom, truth, law, quality of life, etc. The present study highlights two types of social asymmetry: an irreversible one, one of totalitarian societies, and another, a reversible one, inherent in democratic societies. I consider that social asymmetry was at the basis of political upheaval in the communist bloc of the nineties. The balance of any society is ontological, meta-social, centered on the human person. The ontological dimension seen as an existential equilibrium among a multitude of non-quantifiable parameters is the one that sorts the type of society and determines its type of asymmetry.

Keywords:

Social asymmetry; social order; social mechanics; social sense; justice; freedom; legality; democracy; totalitarianism; ontological dimension of society.

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1. Introduction

The concept of *symmetry* is proper to geometry, physics, statistics, linked to its negative charge, the *asymmetry*. What can be observed from the very beginning is that the term *symmetry* designates the balance, which is stable or even static, but it is recessive in nature; whereas *asymmetry* is characteristic to most phenomena in nature and society, dynamic phenomena but not necessarily chaotic. The intent of the present article is to extrapolate the terms of symmetry-asymmetry in the positive, quantitative sciences, in the social and political domain where it takes an operative role. From the moment social asymmetry becomes a quantifiable indicator, it does not exclude some possibilities to measure it or to establish the limits between which it's operable. However, I mention that the degree of social asymmetry is not the deviation from the average of certain consecrated quantitative indices such as living standards, GDP, quality of life, or other indices that reflect the development of societies and which literature does not lack. Here I want to highlight some basic, qualitative, unquantifiable, ontological aspects. Thus, I argue that no matter how developed is the level of living in a non-liberal, totalitarian society, this society appears to be a deeply asymmetrical one as long as it neglects the most elementary desires of the human person, the asymmetry that will lead sooner or later to overthrow that social system. That is why the present issue seeks to answer *a priori* the question: On what kind of philosophical basis is social asymmetry based?

2. Theoretical Background

In Plato's *Republic* [1, 432 a, 434 d – 441 b, 444 a – 449 a], righteousness is the result of the action of other virtues: wisdom, bravery, and temperance. If wisdom and bravery "irradiates" from some individuals to the entire citadel, temperance is the privilege of all citizens, like civic *harmony*.

Then righteousness appears as an *oikeiopraxia* - „vie d'un homme qui ne s'occupe que de ses propres affaires" [2, p. 1355], that is, as Plato points out, that each one exerts in the citadel the occupation to which he is inclined by his nature. The soul of the individual is structured tripartite (like the citadel), with a rational part, another irrational and an electoral one. An individual is *right* when the parts remain in their own. The righteousness of the individual on the one hand determines, on the other hand, it must be reconciled with that of the citadel, according to its laws. Plato tries to justify the good laws and the proper construction of the citadel in an ideal

way, *a priori*. Consequently, I conclude that a correct and just failure of the two systems (individual and citadel) would give rise to three types of asymmetries: the one of the citadel, the individual's and for the relationship between the individual and the citadel.

And at Aristotle, it is a legalist citadel the one that assures the equality of its members before the law, which makes that citadel right [3, 1287 a, 1292 a], [4] etc. Also, the philosopher defines justice as "legality and equality" [5, 1129 a 30, 1130 b 5], justice is a virtue that maintains the state of happiness and prosperity of a political community [5, 1129 b 15 etc.].

So the synonyms of *socio-political asymmetry* in the ancient thinking and setting it on ontological fundamentals (by reference to an *idealway of being*) are: injustice, greed, stupidity, cowardice, illegality, sociopolitical disharmony, inequality before the law, precarious and unjust laws, and so on.

Another theoretical point of view of the concept of *socio-political asymmetry* comes from the mechanistic-reductionist perspective on Cartesian rationalism, Comte's positivism, the empiricism of Durkheim and Weber. On this line, Romanian scholar Spiru Haret, in his paper *Social Mechanics* [6], seeks to capture the laws of society by analogy with the laws of mathematical mechanics. In this attempt, the emphasis is on the objectivity of the social manifestations, the determinism governing social phenomena, the confidence in the experience at the level of society. Legality, rationalism and the prediction of the evolution of society are justified by the analogy and translation of the laws of mechanics into the social study.

In the ideological emulation of the constitution of sociology and psychology as science, at the end of the nineteenth century, mathematics, physics, statistics play a prominent role. Thus, the theoretical relevance of a concept such as *social asymmetry* must be questioned in the context of the existence of necessary laws of social origin; but are there such laws?

Society is not easy to rationalize; in this sense, there is a whole tradition of thinking that opens the "social game" in the favor of individual who tends to occupy a place and a determining role within a rule of law. It is not rationality and determinism that govern the state, but human freedom that only helps rationality. The natural state of the man, freedom, best approximates the ontological condition and the relationships between individuals. By its natural data, man is free from any kind of constraint from another human or from society, and his actions can obtain moral content either by reference to the divinity (an assumed relationship as free as between two persons) either by exercising its natural rights as they are in rational social action. At least on the line of classical liberalism (John Locke, David Hume, John Stuart Mill, etc.), the state is the one who builds and adapts the rational-necessary laws according to the natural laws of man and

the coexistence of the citizens. The criterion of legality is individuality in its free manifestation and only secondary is rationality. Thus, *social asymmetry* should ideally be influenced only by individual diversity based on freedom. Even social conventions are only a rational response to the individual's freedom, society, the state, being a framework of freedom (Hume), prevailing the social conventions that are closest to human nature.

In his political and social philosophy, Hayek captures a fundamental, ontological dimension of society through the concept of "expanded spontaneous order." This is an order that coexists with the organic, non-rational, and that is supposed to preserve certain structures and fundamental elements of society. The social reality is thus meta-social, through an underlying order that is above the patterns, having in the center individual freedom. Freedom assimilated to peace, tranquility, security, the absence of evil is the essential ontological determinant of society, and the concept of "expanded spontaneous order," along with "freedom", "equality before the law," "democracy" are the foundation of society.

3. Argument of the paper

I consider that *social asymmetry* is closely related to the concepts of *justice, freedom, democracy, law, equality*. These concepts will appear throughout the article, having a leading role in determining the relevance, identification and presence of asymmetry in society. There are very complex relationships between these concepts. Often, they are perceived by societies in a contradictory way: either traditionally, as divine rights, or non-traditional, natural, relativistic. Asymmetry therefore starts at the conceptual level. And from the factual point of view, the question arises: when a society is asymmetric in the level of justice? But of freedom? When is society perceived to be unjust, unfaithful, unequal?

Today is the question of legality as a criterion of justice, so who does the law? The strong one? Divinity? No answer can be given to such questions because there is no rational universal one.

In this context, I naturally consider that *social asymmetry* must be assessed in relation to social order: either as an original element of society, which gives it an ontological priority, because the social order comes from an original pre-social asymmetry; either as a constant element of society, as a departure from the existing social order at a given moment, compared to the concepts of justice, equity, social contract, power, social rights, democracy, freedom etc.

Asymmetry gains a polar appearance in which the elements of good and evil conform to the tendencies of the majority (which have often proved to be a brake in the face of progress). That is why we can talk about a *positive social asymmetry* and a *negative social asymmetry*.

By highlighting the ontological prevalence of the term *socio-political asymmetry*, to well-established landmarks such as good, truth, freedom, justice, where the structure, type of society, autonomy, social force and other measurable items or indices result (at individual level and social) a *social sense* is emerging that expresses in essence a dimension of human diversity, an *index of human and social progress*.

4. Arguments to support the thesis

There are no models of society in which there is no asymmetry, for it is intimately linked to progress, or at least to a continuous repositioning towards unanimously, locally or temporarily accepted values; a perfectly symmetrical, domestic society, is a rigid, dogmatic, a dead one. A society is in progress when it uses constructive, creative, imaginative asymmetries, where social actors dispute their chances, needs, assets, responsibilities, where the social trajectories of individuals are not *a priori* traced.

There is no symmetric society - but a stratification of institutional and power-related tendencies - because various social tendencies tend to be balanced at the institutional level; social asymmetry is the engine of society. Asymmetry, as well as in geometry, generates various *social forms* that are in a dynamic balance in a functioning society. Asymmetry is a dynamic social form.

No society is perfectly organized, asymmetry gives an ontological sense to social organization. As well as order, asymmetry manifests itself spontaneously, as a social balancing trend. Asymmetry tends towards symmetry, but symmetry is placed in the field of ideality, while asymmetry in that of social factuality and processuality. But if asymmetry exceeds a certain limit, it can overthrow society on other bases of social order than the old ones (as is the case of revolutions).

When the feeling of social injustice reaches a critical mass, there is a social asymmetry that tends to regain social balance by eliminating the cause that has led to imbalance. Why is this happening and there is not simply a dissolution, a nothingness of that society? I consider that the ontological stake of social asymmetry is based on the hypothesis that there is no corrupted society without resources for recovery, in other words, from the observation of an ontological gap between human beings and society that

must be speculated in favor of the individual wills that integrate determines good, positive sense, of the subsequent society, evolution or social transformations.

Man in general is not good or bad, but the society he is part of can be balanced or not; the balance or imbalance of the individual is taken over by society.

In the perspective of science, but also of political philosophy, factuality, relations between people and relations with the state do not determine an origin point (a null one) to simply consent to a new society that arises from one event to another or from day to day. Even a social discontinuity (as in the 1990s in the communist countries of Europe) is still based on some old structures. The inertia of the new institutions depends on a whole series of factors that often do not reflect the general will. Of course, things can also evolve in the opposite direction to the general positive will, as happens in the case of a feud of a society by a foreign system (as happened after the Second War with our country, and with the countries in the Eastern Communist bloc).

Thus, the Romanian society before 1990 suffered from a type of asymmetry, consisting of all the dysfunctions of a totalitarian society and without real international openness. Social asymmetry has manifested itself in all aspects: individual liberty, respect for human rights, social justice, political, ethical, legal repercussions, etc. Switching from a totalitarian asymmetry to a democratic one implies consuming the trends and strengths of the old society and results in a polarization with negative social trends (as deviations from the general good), although the general sense of transformation is the good one. In Romania, after 1990, the old mentalities have remained or have been sublimated to another level of asymmetry that does not exclude internal reforms and struggles in the context of political pluralism with all inherent dysfunctions.

Looking at asymmetry as a coefficient that integrates social statics and dynamics, entropy and order, social dispersion and homogeneity, external influences (east-west tension), internal dysfunctions (economic, social, moral, cultural etc.), the struggle between traditionalism and social novelty, I will deal here in principle with two variants of social asymmetry that belong to the type of asymmetry that involves or not the change of a social order:

- A1, an inherent, organic asymmetry (it's not stranger to the nature of that society and is in accordance with the socio-political context and the aspirations of the majority of citizens and does not lead to the change of the political, economic and social regime of that state or system which call it *reversible asymmetry*) and

- A2, an asymmetry that leads to the overthrow of the socio-political system, to the "death" of the old society and the "birth" of a new society (*irreversible asymmetry*).

This dichotomy represents the first type (T1) of asymmetry in an exhaustive classification of the socio-political asymmetries that it conceives in the following way:

T1. Reversible asymmetry within the same social order (A1T1);

Irreversible asymmetry that leads to change of social order (A2T1);

T2. Interior asymmetry, intrinsic to a society (To divide the population at ideological, religious, etc. levels through political police, to act legally by imposing values, etc.) (A1T2); External asymmetry - between societies (To impose democracy with force; To influence mutual neighbor societies) (A2T2);

T3. An aggressive asymmetry when a social blanket or society imposes its privileges, system, interests, coercion, force, violence (A1T3);

Peaceful asymmetry, when changes are made without violence (A2T3).

There would be a fourth type of fundamentalist asymmetry, often extremist or religious (counter-asymmetry), where a small community believes in converting the rest of the world to its own beliefs. This kind of asymmetry manifests itself differently, counter-asymmetrically, sometimes by betraying human values, by abdicating from the logical, ontological and axiological foundations of man and society, by the abdication of the rationality of the war: the fundamentalists, the terrorists do not want to change their own society according to universally accepted principles but want to change the world according to their own desires through irrational violence.

5. Arguments to argue the thesis

According to Spiru Haret's conception, the natural dimensions of a society (in analogy with space) are three: economic, intellectual and moral. These dimensions of qualitative nature are quantified in positive and negative terms, with asymmetry likely to emerge from their imbalance. The Romanian scholar constructs a tri-orthogonal "social space" in which he identifies the individual with a material point whose position is defined by three coordinates (x, y, z - economic, intellectual and moral). By analogy with mechanics, one can speak of a "social trajectory", a "resting" one, or "social forces" that lead to the movement in the "social plan" of the individual. Social forces are composed according to the parallelogram rule, a

"center of gravity" of a "social body" made up of several groups with different economic, moral or intellectual interests. In this way, divergent interests of social strata, at some point determines a certain center of gravity, against which the numerical coefficients reflecting the social asymmetry against that problem (such as the pricing of wheat according to the interests of farmers and industrialists [6, p. 53-55].

Social phenomena, social balance, are determined by the action of (socially measurable) social forces that are balanced or not. In all these cases, it depends only on the researcher's ability to assimilate and proceed to the conventions necessary to model the social phenomenon by the forms of rational mechanics.

In terms of social dynamics, it is governed by the well-known principles of inertia, relative movements, action and reaction. Hence, an analogy with mechanics, other concepts such as the uniform or varied movement of the social individual, is developed from time to time with units of measure (day, year, or even centuries!) [6, p.83], the mass and social force, the social movement (after the three social axes mentioned), the principle of minimal social actions etc.

Spiru Haret is aware of the difficulties of such a transposition, drawn to the extreme between physics and society, but is generally confident that they can be removed by various methods, and society can be modeled through the theoretical mechanics.

Of course, in the meantime, both areas have evolved, and the conceptual exchange between them has diversified and nuanced. Also, society has become more malleable through concepts of thermodynamics (entropy, order), probability theory, information theory, feed-back cybernetics, system theory, games theory, etc. But no quantitative discipline, no matter how nuanced, does not surprise the state or social procession. The concept of social asymmetry that I propose is a qualitative-quantitative hybrid that captures and reflects only limited human and asymmetric human relief.

By this I do not simply opt for one or the other side of the barricade (pro-or anti-naturalist - in Popper's language), but I rely on a questioning that surprises the limitations of an ultra-positivist point of view. In the same sense, Karl Popper opposes "historicism", which is a theory that considers history to be predictable by using logical, rationalist or physicalistic methods [7]. The error of naturalist historicism consists in the extrapolation of certain deterministic laws in the social field, which also denotes a misunderstanding of the logical structure of the respective laws. Popper's critique of historicalist theories has a pronounced anti-ideological character, his aim being Marxism, with historical materialism, sociological determinism,

economic historicism, the concrete and historical necessity, the necessary revolution, the end of capitalism and the transition to socialism through revolution. However, Popper does not exclude the possibility of predictions in economic, social or political order and contrasts "utopian and totalitarian engineering", the intervention of certain forces through "gradual social engineering" [7, p. 39].

By their position on the possession of the truth, of their social laws and of their full manipulation, the society that claims to be in the possession of the absolute levers and mechanisms, to discover the total social, political and historical mechanism upon which it possesses control, I believe it is heading to an irreversible asymmetry.

In the materialist-dialectical Marxist literature, there are discussions about irreconcilable "antagonistic contradictions", the capitalist society that ends with social revolutions, and "non-antagonistic contradictions", which are the property of egalitarian societies. But history has proven that things are exactly the opposite. When a society is organized around utopian principles, it acquires the character of an irreversible asymmetry (communism), where social order is maintained through control, force, constraint, planning, diminishing or eliminating individual freedoms - elements that led to the overthrows at the end the 90s in Europe. During this period, the social asymmetry has reached a degree in the communist states that led to a political upheaval (even if it was politically generated, so externally).

In a utopian society there can be no question of an inherent organic asymmetry that contributes to social dynamism, but there is an asymmetry of another nature that makes that society deviate from normality, from the natural social order and lead to all sorts of imbalances: moral, economic, social, political, cultural etc. As a result, irreversible asymmetry has led to the breakdown of the old social structures, of the institutions, which actually generated another society. If tensions cannot be accommodated within the same society, asymmetry reflects a profound dissociation on several planes, which leads to the breakdown of the society in which it occurs. No reformist package within the communist states was able to dissolve its asymmetry. There are no reforms that reduce a totalitarian asymmetry to a democratic one than obviously by changing the political regime.

But paradoxically, it is possible for an irreversible asymmetry society to be more "just" than a democratic one - if it is agreed on a unitary use of the term of justice; but this use is lacking, especially among nostalgic masses. In a reversible - individualistic, competitive society in which tendencies are distributed in a non-uniform way - the concept of *social justice* is meaningless, but the question of justice is placed in a social context in which negative

rights are respected, resulting in the abstract concept of *procedural justice* [8, p. 90].

Nozick discusses justice as *entitlement* [9], after which justice rests upon the observance of the lawfulness of obtaining or transferring the goods.

Rawls brings a constructivist concept about justice, objectivity and moral *fairness*, within a legalistic social group where social actors agree on criteria of what justice is. By eliminating subjectivity, selfishness, individuals by convention are ignorant of their own interests (idealization), which, according to Rawls, rationally exercises opinions [10].

Whether social justice is based on factors such as ensuring the well-being of life, equality of opportunity for every social individual, the normality of a society through the dismantling of individual capacities and social resources, social asymmetry exists. It transcends classical concepts of justice, truth, welfare, etc., introducing an axiological dimension of social differences. So social asymmetry is related to the recognition of value, which imposes it on the ontological and axiological dimensions.

No theory of social justice (subjectivism-objectivism, legalism-cynicism, darwinism-priorityism, etc.) does not explain or eliminate the control of social asymmetry that can grow and overcome that criticism that leads to change and even to social revolutions.

It can also be observed that asymmetry manifests itself *within* a society but at a certain time also *between* types of societies. In communist societies of the 90's, irreversible asymmetry was determined, internally accumulated and external potentiated. The natural tendency of Romanian society was the resumption of a lost European tradition in the post-war years, with the weakening of the Soviet influence that produced reforms within its own system. Without such external relaxation and without the Western model, it would have been possible for the two-type internal asymmetry to have taken longer to produce the shake of the system. After 1990, the movement of Romanian society from an irreversible asymmetry to another reversible, was enhanced by the mirage of a society like the Western one for which the native mentality was not prepared. Thus, on the one hand, without the parable of the West, the local asymmetry had little chance of leading to the social revolution, on the other, the social change once produced, preserved a series of old asymmetric tendencies.

The social change of 1989 was based on an A2 asymmetry that broke and divided the Romanian social corpus. By reforming the system, the institutions, A2 has turned into A1, an asymmetry having side effects (temporary or not) moral, economic, social schizoid crisis. The assimilation of differences, diversity, leveling between native and allogeneic, etc. are

ontological and axiological relief elements that do not advertise to be too easily overcome.

6. Conclusions

To elucidate the features of the term *social asymmetry*, it is found that it captures the point (eventually the origin) of a *social transformation* or social process that tends to bring society back to another level of order, stability, and balance. The irreversible asymmetry has the utopia as an axe, and the reversible one, the liberal-democratic values. It captures (potentially quantitative) a social process with certain dynamics and processuality, depending on a multitude of parameters that reflect a certain social order structure.

It follows that asymmetry will always be determined by the prevalence of social activities and actions with roots and reasons that can be expressed according to an ontological-origin model based on the most intimate human beliefs and tendencies. This model, from a philosophical, theoretical perspective, is an invariant, so a reference.

Social asymmetry may be to a certain extent a multidimensional indicator, a local, relative and relative-measurable concept of the stability of a society. Considering that a society is not a separate body, an autarchical one, but rather in relation to other state, political, economic and other societies and communities, it is the question of different types of asymmetries with endogenous and exogenous indices (which must be reduced to those more significant). A classification of different types of companies outweighs the intentions of this article. There can be no "brain" companies on the outside, and others with centralized central coordination systems, but isolated societies and others that are part of different political and social systems, such as the European Union. Forecasts can be made locally, in the short term and close to close, in an idealized framework. As long as there are major external components that ensure the proper functioning of a company, they must be considered. For Romania, they are desiderata of democracy and norms to be fulfilled at European and world level, given the structures our country has adhered to: NATO and the EU.

The most important asymmetry here is the east-west polarization, conservative-liberalism-social-democracy, with traces of endogenous totalitarianism, mentalities of politicians acting discretionally, according to their own interests, often unanswered by the manipulable majority. But in our case, it can not be said that socio-political tensions and oscillations can

be defused without the achievement of an external balance between the East and the West, which is delayed, and that, over our heads ...

In essence, the individual desires deep freeing of suffering and death, his true desires dissimulate in society, under concepts such as freedom, justice, well-being, etc., often confused. The human person will never be released from his condition, so societies will remain forever asymmetric. Any solution, as a paradise found, will prove incomplete, so society will slowly or convulsively move forward to its determined historical balance in which human beings will never find their place.

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