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Sociability as a Virtue in Multicultural Public Life : Personal Aretology and Axiology in Practice

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SOCIABILITY AS A VIRTUE IN MULTICULTURAL PUBLIC LIFE. PERSONAL ARETOLOGY AND AXIOLOGY IN PRACTICE

Abstract. The main aim of this paper is to present sociability as a virtue, necessary for solving problems in contemporary multicultural public life. Sociability as a virtue means the quality or state of being sociable. It is the individual and unique *habitus* of a particular person, which should be constantly improved and perfected. Sociability is an important part of the aretological and axiological profile of every person. Sociability fosters not only mechanisms of searching for new skills to overcome problems in the multicultural situation, but also helps one find their personal module of virtues, so that they are able to realize all types of interpersonal relationships by knowing, understanding and practically implementing the social and societal order, and remain an integrated personality and a moral person in public life.

Keywords: aretology, axiology, conscience, dialogical personalism, sociability

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1. INTRODUCTION

The main goal of our reflexion is to present sociability as one of the virtues we need to maintain the status of an authentic moral subject in the contemporary, multicultural space of public life. It is plain to see that the world of our mutual, interpersonal relationships is undergoing a profound metamorphosis in result of the processes of globalization. Human beings thus face entirely new challenges, some of which are related to the nature of their presence in the public space, and the quality of social relationships.

In this context, we need to ask very specific questions: How can the progressing atomization and fragmentation of social life be stopped? How can the quality of interpersonal relationships be improved? Does the quality of those relationships depend solely on the physical and mental condition of a particular person? To what extent should we also take into account the aretological and axiological dispositions of individual people? Which of these dispositions in particular determine the quality of our moral life in the public space? Is there a matrix of the most crucial virtues or behaviours which determine our mutual relationships and the ethical level of our public life in multicultural societies?

In our reflection, we will attempt to show sociability as a virtue which helps people properly experience the social dimension of their existence. Sociability as a virtue means the quality or state of being sociable. It is the individual and unique *habitus* of a particular person, which should be constantly improved and perfected so that it can become the centre, the main axis of all interpersonal relationships. Sociability is an important part of the aretological and axiological profile of every person. In this paper, we discuss sociability first of all as a disposition (ability, capacity, feature, virtue).

We must acknowledge the fact that in any society there are persons, who appear not to possess the virtue of sociability¹. Sometimes,

¹ Cf. A. Máteľ, M. Schavel, *Aplikovaná sociálna patológia v sociálnej práci*, Bratislava 2011.

it may be part of their inner disposition which is never used in practice. We may talk about the following four categories of people to whom the virtue of sociability is alien: 1) Anti-social persons who, for various reasons, do not want to exercise the virtue of sociability and who deliberately refuse to become engaged in interpersonal relationships; 2) Nihilist persons, who do not exercise the virtue of sociability because they believe social life has no value – like all the rest of reality, it consists in nothingness; 3) Socially unadjusted persons, who cannot find their place in the society and public life; 4) Asocial people, who believe they do not need interpersonal relationships and unconsciously isolate themselves from that reality.

At the philosophical level, the most adequate discussion of the virtue of sociability is found in dialogical personalism (G. Marcel, R. Guardini, M. Buber, K. Jaspers, K. Vrána, J. Poláková, E. Lévinas, K. Wojtyła, B. Vyšeslavcev, H. Hrehová)². In that concept, it is in the meeting of the “I” and the “you” that a person is truly realized. A person realizes their “I” in the act of saying “you”. Which, of course, does not mean the “I” is entirely dynamic and finds its complete fulfilment in that act. A person is also a form which lasts. The notion of a person cannot be treated in relative terms. The category of a person must be guaranteed to every human being, always and in categorical terms. A person does not only exist in personal acts; their personal existence belongs to the essence of their constitution.

Many advocates of dialogical personalism (Ebner, Guardini) point to the need for human existence to open up to transcendence. From that point of view, an individual is an ontologically open structure. The human “I” reveals itself as something that cannot substantiate itself. The “I” discovers its createdness, the fact its existence is derived from another being. Consequently, it is God who becomes one’s true “you”, and

² Cf. K. Vrána, *Dialogický personalismus*, Praha 1996; J. Poláková *Filosofie dialogu. Uvedení do jednoho z proudů filosofického myšlení 20. století*. Praha 1993; H. H. Schrey, *Dialogisches Denken. Erträge der Forschung*, Darmstadt 1970; H.L. Goldschmidt, *Dialogik. Philosophie auf dem Boden der Neuzeit*, Frankfurt am Main 1964; M. Theunissen, *Der Andere. Studien zur Sozialontologie der Gegenwart*, Berlin 1965.

all other forms of “you” only indicate the true “You” of the human being. The being of our “I” is contained in the fact God is our “You”. That reality is rooted in the mystery of creation, when God made himself our “You”. In the I-You relationship with God, the human being finds their ontological foundation. The I-You relationship does not simply refer to the absolute “You”, but to the absolute Personality who is trinitary.

In dialogical personalism, the dignity of a person is related to morality, for which moral law recognized by our conscience is of fundamental importance³. A person’s moral sensitivity depends on the shape and maturity of their conscience, which points to authentic good in the particular circumstances of our lives⁴. Thus, conscience stands to defend the identity and integrity of a person⁵.

2. SOCIABILITY AS PART OF THE AXIO- AND ARETOLOGICAL PROFILE OF A PERSON LIVING IN THE CONTEMPORARY MULTICULTURAL SOCIETY

The next step in our reflection is a discussion of the way sociability functions in various interpersonal relationships. First, we should go back to the terminology and methodology of dialogical personalism, to recognize the issue of sociability in the axiological and aretological profile of a human being. A person is a dialogical being, who exists in the world engaged in a number of various social relationships. Individuals, as dialogical beings, live in the centre of interpersonal relationships. There are two main types of relationships between people: personal and impersonal ones⁶. Within these two spheres, relevant virtues may develop: in personal relationships, the important virtue is friend-

³ Cf. R. Guardini, *Dobro, svědomí a soustředování*, trans. F. Lobkowicz, Praha 1999, 39.

⁴ Cf. K. Jaspers, *Otázka viny*, trans. J. Navrátil, Praha 1969, 7.

⁵ Cf. K. Vadíková, *Human Rights and Personal Conscience. Axiology in Praxis*, in: *Prawa człowieka i świat wartości*, ed. R. Moń, A. Kobyliński, Warszawa 2011, 49–61.

⁶ See Tab. 1.

ship; in impersonal relationships, in the social dimension, fundamental significance is that of the virtue of sociability⁷.

Every mature person has their own mixture of virtues which make their life distinct and unique⁸. In personal relationships, it is a particular person that is responsible for the quality of the bonds of friendship or camaraderie they engage in. In the dimension of social relationships, on the other hand, we should also take into account the level of socialization in a particular community, as well as many other cultural, political or economic factors. Personal relationships are founded on the grounds of conscience and moral law; the foundation of social relationships is conscience and moral law, as well as the ethical principles embraced and practiced by a particular community. In every society, objective moral law should be the basis of ethical principles, customs and norms of positive law.

Sociability may be understood first of all as the capacity to adapt to the circumstances prevailing in the particular community in which one lives. In practice, this may mean, for instance, a proper understanding of the way moral law is perceived by that community, or respect for the distinct features of its culture. Such attitude is particularly valuable in contemporary multicultural societies⁹.

The processes of globalization we are witnessing now contribute to disseminating, on the planetary scale, the principle of ethical pluralism, and constructing a moral order without any permanent metaphysical or religious foundations. This gives rise to situational ethics which sprouts from the thinking paradigm advocating a pluralism of values and concepts of good life¹⁰. Such process leads to a redefinition

⁷ Cf. K. Glasová, J. Glasa, *Potreba dialógu a dialogických vzťahov v etickej komisii*, *Medicínska Etika & Bioetika* 14(2007)1–2, 2–5.

⁸ Cf. T. Steinbüchel, *Die philosophische Grundlegung der katholischen Sittenlehre*, in: *Handbuch der katholischen Sittenlehre*, ed. F. Tillmann, Düsseldorf 1938, 157.

⁹ Cf. M. Šauerová, *Vývoj postoju spoločnosti ke svobode an zodpovednosti po roce 1990*, in: *Transformácia ľudskej identity po roku 1990*, ed. H. Hrehová, Trnava 2010, 323–328.

¹⁰ A terminological distinction between the notion of *situational ethics* (a decision is made in a particular situation by a person, who is aware of its uniqueness – depending

of the basic notions of moral philosophy. Examples of such changes, brought about mostly by the contemporary phenomenon of globalization, include, among others, the concept of situational ethics proposed by J. Fletcher¹¹, or the proposals made by some representatives of communitarianism¹².

3. A TYPOLOGY OF HUMAN RELATIONSHIPS AND THE EXERCISE OF SOCIABILITY IN ALL OF THEIR TYPES

Sociability is characterized by a specific set of virtues (Tab. 1) exercised in social relationships¹³. That set is constructed individually by every person depending on their educational resources and personal experience. The natural consolidation of that set progresses through the improvement of personal relation-ability, through solidarity, into sociability (Tab. 2). That is why it is very important to enter social relationships as a prepared, stable and mature personality¹⁴. This can be achieved through interpersonal relationships (self-knowledge, self-identification); it is a continual, lifelong process, however (a personal way of socialization and enculturation).

The contemporary multicultural society has a number of new strategies, techniques, and educational programs at its disposal – offering a wide range of material and spiritual aids in finding one's way in the maze of various possibilities of living one's life in the global dimension. Sociability helps us contain the violence of the global society in our personal and impersonal relationships. It helps us preserve our di-

on unique circumstances) and the *ethics of situation* (a person in a situation decides on the type of ethics of the situation and solves the current problems according to its principles) is rare, but often used in ethical praxis in the contemporary multicultural society.

¹¹ Cf. J. Fletcher, *Situační etika*, trans. J. Zámečník, Praha 2009.

¹² Cf. D. Bell, *Comunitarianism and its Critics*, Oxford 1993.

¹³ There are various types of social relationships in the typology of human relationships. In our reflection, we have all of them in mind.

¹⁴ Cf. T. Steinbüchel, op. cit., 157.

gnity and integrity in the centre of these relationships, and make good, moral decisions.

3.1. THE INTRAPERSONAL RELATIONSHIP: SOCIABILITY AS A STABILIZER IN THE PROCESSES OF SOCIALIZATION AND ENCULTURATION

Sociability works as a stabilizer for personal self-identification in the processes of socialization and enculturation. A person must face external influences in their inner world and try to identify themselves so that they become an integral personality in the centre of interpersonal relationships. They decide about their personal identity, recognize their own personal aretological and axiological profile. Their conscience confirms their identity and integrity as the person recognizes the truth of what is good according to their personal priorities and values.

The material obtained in the course of socialization and enculturation processes should be used as a source of information in the decision making process. Thus, step by step, a person builds their own aretological profile and learns the principles of solidarity and sociability. They may then choose a set of virtues, which will help them become a solidary and sociable person. And *vice versa* – improved sociability enables the person to recognize the truth of what is good in the presented form of common good while they are searching for their own identity in the multicultural situation, and to engage in all types of human relationships in the society.

3.2. THE INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIP: SOCIABILITY AS AN IMPROVEMENT OF SELF-KNOWLEDGE AND SELF-IDENTIFICATION OF PERSONS IN DIALOGUE

People used to practice sociability as a virtue enabling them to meet others in dialogue. By staying in touch with their own conscience in the decision making process, a person faces themselves. In the circumstances of personal socialization and enculturation processes, they are searching for their identity and trying to stabilize themselves in the centre of interpersonal relationships. In a dialogue, a person faces not only themselves and another person, but also the society communicated and represented by that person in dialogue. Such confrontation

requires particular, secure circumstances to be properly accomplished – as is the case in the situation of a *personal encounter*¹⁵.

Sociability enhances the identification of both persons, because in a dialogue, both of them are invited to communicate and confront their interpretation of material obtained in the processes of personal socialization and enculturation. It helps them to distinguish information with reference to which they should identify themselves, that which can be accepted into their personal integrity and is valuable for their moral life. In the circumstances of the contemporary multicultural society, this means continuous self-confrontation, self-recognition, and self-identification, living an active public life in the centre of interpersonal relationships.

3.3. SOCIABILITY AS A KEY TO LIVING IN THE SOCIAL ORDER

Sociability serves as a key, *organon*, a mechanism which helps defend one's personal identity in impersonal relationships. In societal relationships, sociability develops into sociality. A person is able to understand and live in the social order, and to stay at least decent in public life. Sociality can improve or destroy any social endeavour. It depends on the engagement of all members of a particular society and on the definition of common good, on whether the social and societal order is built on the principles of ethics or not.

Unlike sociability, sociality may become a product of indoctrinated socialization or violent enculturation. Sociability is based on personal relationships (self-knowledge, self-identification, self-confrontation, dialogue) – unlike sociality. The exercise of sociability contributes to a person's moral virtues; the exercise of sociality, on the other hand, contributes to a person's decency. If a person learns how to be societal, it does not mean they learn how to be social. The exercise of sociability is necessary both in personal and impersonal relationships. As will be discussed below, it is a virtue which needs to be trained and improved in the contemporary multicultural society.

¹⁵ Cf. K. Vrána, *op. cit.*, 39–43.

4. TERMINOLOGICAL ASPECTS OF THE NOTION SOCIABILITY

Terminology related to the notion sociability is a very interesting field of research. In the context of dialogical personalism, it is primarily related to the typology of interpersonal relationships, and may be defined as a combination of relation-ability, solidarity, sociality. The aretological distinction shows it as a part of the aretological profile of a person in the centre of interpersonal relationships, and a condition for the establishment of social relationships. We can thus think of sociability in positive terms, seeing it as a virtue and distinguishing between a person's talent, skill, feature and ability; or in negative terms, seeing it as a vice and distinguishing between wickedness and lewdness.

Sociability is rarely described as a vice, but it can be seen that way. Such description points out that an error has occurred in the process of establishing relationships, which has resulted in a deformation of sociability into anti-sociability. The consequences are disastrous both for the personality of the one engaged in such social relationships, and for the functioning of the society as a whole. It may be supposed that in such situation all types of relationships are in some way deformed, and complete re-socialization is required. Sociability, used as a talent, is the main virtue exercised in social relationships. An individual is naturally a dialogical being, capable of recognizing the imperative of good in moral law and to decide whether to respect it or not. To remain a human being in public life means to live in accordance with one's conscience, which in turn means living in accordance with moral law in its unique personal interpretation.

If a person defends their human dignity, the dignity of mankind is defended as well. Consequently, sociability understood as a talent represents a deliberate realization of all types of interpersonal relationships at least in name of human dignity to fulfil moral law (to be aware of the imperative of human rights). This is a given kind of virtue – a talent, which means every human being should have it in their aretological profile right from their birth; it exists, however, without any assumption that they automatically recognize it, develop or improve in their life. It depends on the quality and progress of self-identification and self-knowledge.

It must be gradually discovered within one's personal experience in the intrapersonal relationship or be guided by one's conscience, a good friend, fellowship in interpersonal relationships; it may also be identified and gradually recognized through special training (psychotherapy). And yet, more and more people in the contemporary multicultural society lose their orientation on humanity in public life and need help in finding a way of living their life in the centre of interpersonal relationships.

Nevertheless, sociability is most naturally understood as a talent when it comes to its substance and definition¹⁶. There are other ways of learning how to exercise it in a moral way in interpersonal relationships: one may accede to a request to accept sociability as needed and learn how to exercise it – a skill; take friendly advice into account, recognize that sociability needs to be exercised, and make steps needed to recognize it as talent in one's aretological profile, or as a skill to be incorporated into one's aretological profile so that it can be exercised – a feature; consult one's aretological profile through dialogue, take friendly, encouraging advice into account, and mobilize oneself to exercise sociability in one's own way – an ability. Sociability in the contemporary multicultural society is a challenge. It is an appeal to the conscience of any human being at least to undertake to exercise sociability in interpersonal relationships. It is a great moral imperative binding on all men.

If there is an individual obstacle to recognizing and exercising sociability as a talent in the particular history of one's life, it is possible to learn and be trained in techniques which help morally realize interpersonal relationships (social psychology, psychotherapy, psychopathology, sociology). It is based mainly on the theoretical and practical know-

¹⁶ A person, who understands and exercises sociability as a talent, knows how to build it as a specific set of virtues in their aretological profile. Into this set, they incorporate all virtues, which are required in the process of establishing relationships, both defending their own identity and understanding the requirements of common good. It is an individual and personal process, which represents their personal experience of interpersonal relationships. Therefore, it is not possible to make a single, authoritative list of virtues, which express sociability as a talent; we can, however, emphasize humanity as the main common virtue to be included in any personal list.

ledge of the social and societal order (socialization, re-socialization, enculturation, re-enculturation, acculturation, etc.). If a person takes education impersonally, mechanically, or as a kind of violent indoctrination, there are not much chances they will learn how to exercise sociability; nevertheless, they will at least be trained in the mechanisms of living in the contemporary multicultural society.

A person, who understands sociability as a feature has a combination of trained and learned techniques at their disposal, can exercise a developed set of virtues, and is a stabile personality (a consolidated intrapersonal relationship). They continually share their own dialogical existence in the centre of interpersonal relationships (moral interpersonal relationships). They learn the necessary skills from advice, improve their aretological profile, and feel secure in personal encounters. Step by step, guided by a friendly hand, they incorporate what they have learned into their own character and make sociability a virtue of their personality which should be exercised and continually improved.

If a person is able to recognize the need for a personal, dialogical sharing of one's own existence in the personal types of interpersonal relationships, and to actually do it, they confirm their personal ability to follow continual, trans-generationally communicated knowledge incorporated into the principles of social and societal orders. They are aware of the global situation of mankind and understand that this ability (sociability) should be continually improved through training in proper socialization and enculturation techniques, defined by the conditions of living in the contemporary multicultural society – faced in the centre of interpersonal relationships.

5. SOCIABILITY AS A VALUE – AXIOLOGY IN PRACTICE

If sociability becomes a value for a person, they know and appreciate the benefits of exercising sociability in their personal history. They make autonomous decisions on their participation in all types of interpersonal relationships. If sociability becomes a quality in the history of a person's life, that history becomes a more valuable contribution to the society and to the person's status in the society. In their mind,

it represents social acceptance, respect and honour. The content of the notion of sociability is similar to that of adaptability, which is not the way we understand the essence of sociability in the context of dialogical personalism.

If a person includes sociability into their schedule of priorities for a short period in life, it expresses their current needs and reveals a lack of social and societal relationships. It is not natural to make sociability one's personal priority for a long time. It can deform one's personality and destroy other relationships, both personal and impersonal ones. Sociability as a value means respect for personal dignity as the dignity of mankind itself.

6. CONCLUSIONS

Sociability works as a virtue within the axiological profile of a person living in the centre of interpersonal relationships in the contemporary multicultural society. Each person has their unique axiological and aretological profile. Sociability – together with truthfulness, kindness, respect or sense of humour – is often presented as one of the minor virtues¹⁷. They have been somewhat forgotten, pushed to the margins of public discourse. If we made an experiment, however, and eliminated them from our lives, we would painfully realize how much we miss them. For minor does not mean less important. After all, it is quiet sociability that creates the foundations of moral praxis and the basis of social relationships.

Minor virtues can also be compared to minor values discussed by Nicolai Hartmann. They are not placed up high in the axiological hierarchy, but their force is greater. After all, we are not expected to be heroic on a daily basis. One may act heroically in favourable circumstances, if they face up to the challenge. We can, however, be kind or sociable every day, without any special occasion, without special effort.

¹⁷ Cf. P. Domeracki, M. Jaranowski, M. T. Zdrenka, *Sześć cnót mniejszych*, Toruń 2012.

Trained sociability helps a person discover new trends in the realization of interpersonal relationships in the contemporary multicultural society, and helps them nurture their personal virtues. In result, they can live a better life and improve their ability to share it in interpersonal relationships, to develop and realize social and societal relationships – all of that as a moral being. Sociability fosters not only mechanisms of searching for new skills to overcome problems in the multicultural situation, but also helps one find their personal module of virtues, so that they are able to realize all types of interpersonal relationships by knowing, understanding and practically implementing the social and societal order, and remain an integrated personality and a moral person in public life.

Tab. 1: Sociability as a virtue in human relationships.
A typology of human relationships in public life

Personal relations		Impersonal relations	
Intrapersonal relationships	Interpersonal relationships	Social relationships	Societal relationships
I – I	I – You	I – We	I – They
Introspection	Face to face	Person in a social group	Person in a society
Moral norms	Moral and ethical norms	Social order (manners, traditional opinion, public opinion, ethics)	Societal order (legislation, public opinion, traditional opinion, ethics)
Morality	Morality and decency	Ethical behaviour, decency, morality	Decency, formal behaviour
Staying in touch with own conscience in the decision-making process	Dialogue, sharing, facing	Communication, manners	Conventions, tradition, formal behaviour
Ability to dialogue – brought into the heart of discourse; introspection	Ability to dialogue – dialogical silence, heart to heart dialogue, face to face dialogue, confrontation	Communicativeness, Conversableness, Conviviality	Communicativeness Protocol conversation Societal communication Formal behaviour

Ability to share – prayer; personal integrity; staying in touch with one’s conscience;	Ability to share – self-giving, friendly reception, acceptance, respect, honour, dignity, contiguity, companionableness, impartation, commitment	Sociability Gregariousness Comity	Civility Sociality Decency Courteousness Politeness
Relation-ability	Solidarity	Sociability	Sociality

Tab. 2

The natural way of socialization and enculturation Personal relationships → Impersonal relationships relation-ability → solidarity → sociability → sociality
Sociability as a stabilization of interpersonal relationships relation-ability ← solidarity ← sociability → sociality
Sociability as a virtue needed in the society relation-ability → solidarity → sociability ← sociality

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