



Prof. Esad Bajtal, PhD, a philosopher, sociologist, psychologist from Sarajevo, is one of the most influential intellectuals in the region. He is a lecturer, writer, and editor of electronic and print media.

He is known for his ruthless critical analysis of the situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

CIVIL COURAGE BETWEEN FEAR AND CONSCIENCE

The question of human courage has to start with the fact of human fear. And the human is a fearful being. And the fear is the source of all his life troubles. Psychologists describe fear as a primary emotion, an unpleasant arousal resulting from an expectation of *real* or a *fictitious* danger, before which a human is powerless.

In the psychological sense apart from the **real** – **objective** fear, there is also the *neurotic*, fictitious, objectless fear. **The objectless fear**, the trepidation, the dread, the anxiety weighs on every human and underlies any other fear.

It is the subconscious fear of **dying**, of the possibility "to not to be anymore".

The horror of this diffuse dread drives a human to do something. Among other things, to escape to a *forced neurosis*. In his dread of the un-being, a neurotic is fully oriented to attempt self-salvation. No concern of social nature touches him.

In the irrational fight against the **Nothing**, the neurotic eliminates himself from the possible fight "**for something**". In this way, he stays outside the civil engagement, where mature, conscientious personalities are confirmed firmly facing challenges of the change to the given social concept.

Let me be more precise: the unbearable horror of dread, the fear of the **Nothing**, forces a human to transform it to the fear "**from something**" – anything, really. Because it is much easier to endure a **specific** fear (fear from **Something**), than the diffuse dread (from the **Nothing**). Thus, the **object** fear presents itself as a typically human form of escaping the **Dread**.

HOW DOES IT HAPPEN?

While fleeing from the unclear objectless dread (i.e. the **Nothing**), a human starts to make up **Something** (i.e. objects of his fear). Thus the **objectification** of the **invisible** dread results in the fabrication of enemies as **visible** objects of fear. Therefore, since the fear does not have its concrete object, any rational fight against it has already been fully incapacitated.

Unlike the objectless **dread** (anxiety), the fear has its clearly recognizable objects and the "courage" directed at them has something to confront. Which means that on the level of the disturbed social relations, the dread objectifies its unbearable, frightening, **invisible Nothing** into the **visible** fear from the **Other**.

This objectification of Nothing to Something, turns the Dread into – Fear, and thus opens the field of relieving participation: in this way the **false** fear delivers **false** (soldier's) courage, which, as unconscious, rationalized cowardice is *temporarily* unloaded by crime, i.e. by the destruction of the Other as the visible object of its fear, or, by expressing support to organizers and perpetrators of a crime. However, any attempt to irreversibly **transform** the Dread to Fear, is futile. Because "the basic dread, the dread of the final being due to the threat of the un-being, cannot be eliminated. It belongs to the very existence". Hence the baton of disguised cowardice, which, in the form of the majority's public opinion, with calm conscience, with elections and votes, formally and democratically, has been supporting the most inconsiderate and irrational modes of totalitarian rule and authority. The length of the rule is rationally unpredictable.

The **Dread** as the existential basis of the fear cannot be removed in a maneuver: **object-stylized courage cannot contain the dread from the Un-being**. How is true courage even possible then?

The true (civil) courage is possible only as the self-confirmation "in spite" – in spite the dread of the Un-being. Courageous are only those who are able to accept the dread of the Un-being in themselves. Courageous are only those whose Conscience is stronger than the Dread. Therefore, **civically courageous** are only those who facing themselves, facing their conscience, **do not have courage to be cowards**. Only those, who, *instead* of the Other are afraid of *Themselves*.

Because the ethical, unlike the ethnical STOCK, is taken only by – *oneself*.

And this is the key moment for starting the courage which is recognized as *civic courage in action*:

Which is the **courage of rationally resisting the irrational walk of ideologically designed destiny**.

But, what is conscience?

It is a complex psychological phenomenon. We distinguish between the **ethical** and **moral** conscience. Genealogically, the *ethical conscience* did not *originate*, i.e. it is not a product of experience, but in Jungian terms, it is a genuine, *archetypal* phenomenon, belonging to the *call of the primary*. Unlike the ethical, the customary – *moral conscience* – is closer to the Freudian *Superego*, and as such, in moments when folkways are breached, it communicates feelings of embarrassment and discomfort. It is the reflex response of remorseful guilty conscience to the disobedience shown to the collective; the reaction of **fear** from authority, i.e. rule. In the fear from fear, a peculiar twist occurs: an individual, instead of being afraid, starts to admire the rule – "it is easier to admire than fear". Our question is: What happens when ethical and moral conscience collide? When they come into conflict? Two outcomes are possible: THE FIRST: the ethical conscience *should* take precedence over the moral conscience. And it is what happens with a healthy, self-developed and self-responsible individual. THE SECOND: As opposed to that, an infantile, dependable individual, conditioned by folkways, in his auto-subordination (dependence) feels **obligation** towards the adopted moral conscience, imposed from outside. And this unquestionable obligation *towards others*, the authority of any kind, the Leader, the Party, the God, **delivers** him of the responsibility *for oneself*.

An individual conditioned by folkways may function only as a specimen of a species, a specimen of a herd and behaves like a mass swayed by inertia. He thinks and carries himself in a way which is completely opposed to the way when he is alone and outside the crowd. Precisely this explains why a crowd is not capable for actions requiring a higher degree of intelligence and *conscious* discernment which is capable of answering to the call of the Self's ethical conscience. Because "in crowds it is the stupidity and not mother wit that is accumulated" (Le Bon). In this sense, the crowd is untruth and an abstraction (Kierkegaard). Ergo: the crowd does not need civic courage to get confirmation from itself, simply because the crowd does not have the self – "for a crowd is an abstraction", the untruth.

The basic feature of a **dependent** personality is that her opinion, decisions and behavior are uncritically tied to requests of a reference group, public opinion, nation, religion or culture she belongs to.

That is the conscience of the crowd and irresponsibility, i.e. the conscience of the **one-sided responsibility**: the responsibility "for us" and non-responsibility "for them". In this situation the individual determination and **civil** courage gesture is missing as a **practical** response to the call of the ethical conscience. For the **ethical conscience** is a resolute response to the silent call of the human, i.e. inner voice. This silent call is not a voice of anything external. Anything normative. It is neither the voice of an Authority: the nation, the religion, the ideology. No! It is a **silent** voice of one's **own Being**. Therefore, anyone who fails to respond to the voiceless *call of conscience* (as the call of one's own being) – shall owe it to oneself. And nobody else. It is here that the true ethical problem originates: **to owe (to Oneself) is psychological more difficult than to feel owing (to Another)**. This unpleasant internal debt (**the troublesome feeling of utmost disturbing psychological misbalance**) in the area of demanding and ethically provocative daily life can get rid of the debt by one gesture only, the gesture of the rebellion in the name of the ethical conscience. And precisely with this – *to owe*, to **owe to oneself**, we come to the deepest essence, value and sense of the civil courage. Ergo: **Civically (humanly) courageous are only those** who lack courage **to owe it to themselves. Without the ethical conscience and owing to oneself, a human is not the Human. One no longer is and cannot be - Oneself.**

In one's non-selfness, one is merely a conscienceless lump of proteins, reflexively responsible to a normative of a collective against which is not wisely to sin. Since sinning against the Collective is the embodiment of all possible sins a society would not tolerate. The redemption of the sin is possible only publicly or by secretly practicing servility of a person who would change her primal "Me" for an ambitious, abstract "Us" in the cheapest way possible.

HENCE: The conformist democracy of modern societies discourages any individual's popping out of a folkway rut and accidentally blocks the civil courage reflex without which there is no rebellion. The modern filter democracy is a covert collectivism-conformism, which is suspicious of any liberalism and individualism. In this sense: the sleek, filtered democracy, deprived of civil courage "accidents" can easily become oppressive with the tendency of gradually transgressing to a totalitarian collectivism of a bolshevist, a Hitler-like nationalist or another, similar type. **Therefore, the civil courage is the democratic imperative of our times.** Even more so since the everyday promotion of collective values makes it harder to recognize actual dangers to individualism and freedoms of individual expression. Thus it does not wonder the scarcity of civil courage expression **where the subject of public ridicule "is not the conformist crowd, but the eccentric (the individual) who still dares to think autonomously."**

What is the answer to fear and manipulation by fear?

Critical thinking is the only possible answer and opposition to manipulation by fear! The rationalistic cry of the Enlightenment: *Sapere aude!* Is the call to the human to use his own reason, bravely and without someone else's leadership. To follow the path of one's own feeling and understanding of life is the true human path. The path that often (depending on circumstances) implies a lower or higher dose of civil courage. The Enlightenment stressed the living importance of individual experience and reason. With the Age of Enlightenment the ideal of the "liberal, secular and democratic communities" ascended, which are not possible without individual freedom and rational and intellectual independence of an individual.

Enlightenment thinkers stressed the importance and the critical quality of reason, the independence of thought and the fight against the cognitive, moral, legal, theological and social prejudice" (P. Vranicki).

To say in advance: "*I believe*" or "*I do not doubt*", it means to cheaply and hastily give in and wave one's human and civil right, acquired by birth: *the right to doubt*. The right to one's own opinion. In short, here, in the uncritical, blind faith, lies the devastating inception of all human stupidity, because: **"To force oneself to believe and to accept a thing without understanding is political, and not spiritual or intellectual"** (W.Rahula).

THEREFORE:

The civil courage as the critical thought of not accepting alluring political ideas is the true human harbor. Without the civil courage we do not stand either a human, or a living chance. To die cheaply **for** a disastrous daily political story **from** which deceivers make a nice and snug living, it is the first and most senseless price to pay for the lack of civil courage and the indecisiveness to think with your own head.

The massive economic and spiritual misery we live in today is the **devastating price to pay for the unpreparedness to be critical of those ideas which, by a well-calculated and seductive language of patriotic pathos, drew us into the uncertain adventure of war turmoil and death.**

Thus, **the intellectual doubt**, as the only correct approach to the daily politics talk, implies a sober *logical test* of all the data and "facts" which are to help us to avoid the destructively timed rhetorical seduction and emotionally hasty basis of judgement. In practice this means the following:

1. **Permanent** intellectual effort while differentiating between **reliable** and **unreliable** sources of information;
2. **Recognizing** stereotypes and **prejudices** in information and their **conscious** refusal;
3. **Recognizing** essential information and **contrasting** them with the rhetoric of the seductive;

And finally,

4. **Selecting** and **critical** evaluation of all **information** against personal **life experience**.

Of course, the skill of the usual manipulative rule over people implies breaking all forms of expressing the civil individuality, perfidiously at first and then openly and violently harsh, in favor of mute servile obedience to the Tradition, the Folkways, the Church, the System, the Party, the Leader...

Thus, **every political regime**, with the intention of better and bigger control, seeks to develop an unpleasant **feeling of guilt** among its subjects, by constantly **questioning** the supposed "correctness" of their conduct, by publicly mocking all individuals whose independent behavior deviates and is not in accord with the propagated daily political idea of the "correct", i.e. expected behavior.

HOW IS IT DONE?

Public reprimands and public **condemnations**, referencing and labelling of disobedient individuals serve to automatically **paralyze** their opinion and free expression. Thus, instead of **critically** evaluating the current reality, an atmosphere of collective **caution** and individual insecurity (auto-censorship) is **modelled**, which produces **servile**, conformist behavior in citizens. In this way, the current political order is consolidated, regardless of how, objectively, in itself, it was otherwise irrational, i.e. logically and humanly unacceptable.

WHAT IS THE FINAL RESULT?

The acceptance of behavior imposed by the political control leads to an unhealthy withdrawal to oneself and defeatist giving in to the unpredictable elements of politicking irresponsibility.

Psychologically: conscious or unconscious discontent due to shameful self-denial makes people insecure, doubtful and **hostile** towards the rest of the world. Which means: towards everything **other** and **different**. To put it even shorter: towards everything that is **"not ours"**. And this is the deep, psychological basis of the human material prepared to become yes men, from which the authority drafts future murderers and villains who are prepared to do literally **anything** asked, at command and in the name of the supposed defense of the Faith, the People and the State.

Here lies the secret of Dubrovnik and Sarajevo's destruction; here lies the secret of Vukovar and Srebrenica; here lies the secret of 500 mass graves scattered over the smaller entity in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Here lies the meaning of the recently held referendum based on fear and hate of others and the absence of critical thinking among ethno-servants of a Leader immersed in crime.

Civil courage as a principled and practical life attitude does not have any logical or existential alternative. We have to live a civically (rationally) courageous life to make the instinct-driven courage (in its militaristic execution) existentially redundant and unnecessary, thus making the life more normal and humane, i.e. humanly more dignified.

Because a human being without dignity is nothing.

Anything else is just pure rationalization and pseudo-patriotic and intrusive misleading of the public (the first lie), put into service of the calculated and cowardly cheap self-deception (the second lie).

Therefore, a lie in a lie!

SUMMARY

The question of the civil courage as the core question of a community's democratization, in the originally psychological sense, is the question of the deal an ethically aware individual has achieved with oneself. **As an act of the rational self-confirmation, led by conscience, the civil courage provides us with the dignity of a being capable of making a choice, and thus, saying NO! to destiny.**

Due to the lack of civil courage, by consenting to the system of conceptually marketed values, individuals would lose the social battle and wave their natural right to doubt and decide. **The true (civil) courage is possible only as self-confirmation "in spite" – in spite of the dread from the Un-being. Brave are only those who are capable (Socrates, Giordano Bruno and the like) to take in the dread of the Un-being. Courageous are only those whose Conscience is stronger than the Dread.**

Formally and logically a paradox, but psychologically true and confirmed by self-experience, civically courageous are *only those* who (facing themselves and facing their conscience) lack the courage to be cowards.

Only those, who instead of the Other, fear Themselves.

This speech was given by Prof. Esad Bajtal, PhD at the Croatian Humanist Conference „Atheist Freedom, Humanist Conscience and Feminist Courage“, organised in 2016 in Zagreb, Croatia by the Center for Civil Courage.

Translation by: Tanja Martinovic-Vucetic