

Peter SAJDA

Personal Ethics and Political Action

Human communities tend to live in a structured way. Structure assigns different roles and duties to groups and individuals that are then considered responsible for the compliance with these roles and duties. In the field of power, structure produces power distribution. In a structured society power can be delegated according to the rules stipulated by the given society (e.g. democracy) or it can be exercised without a broader consensus of the society (e.g. autocracy). No matter whether the power has been delegated or seized, those who exercise it generally claim to represent the society. If the society has a form of a state, these individuals add to their previous identities a new one – the identity of a statesman or politician. This identity then necessarily co-shapes their other identities, as well as it is co-shaped by them. It is the aim of this essay to present some hints concerning the interaction between the ethical or spiritual identity of an individual and her or his identity of a statesman/stateswoman or politician.

I. INTERPLAY OF THE ETHICAL AND THE POLITICAL

Urho Kekkonen: Personal Virtues vs. Virtues of State

“It is time to put an end to unrealistic political attitudes, based on personal bitterness, which have already led their adherents to a dead end. May SPINOZA’s words, ‘*The grandeur of spirit or courage of spirit, they are private virtues, the virtue of state is security*’, give them personal satisfaction and convey the respect of their countryfellow. As they leave the scene, they will know that they will be serving the supreme purpose of a citizen, the security of their own country.”¹ These words were uttered by the President of Finland Urho KEKKONEN in his speech delivered on November 26, 1961 in connection with a tension between

Peter SAJDA is a Graduate of the Faculty of Arts of the Comenius University in Bratislava, Slovakia. He is a member of Ekunet Slovakia, an ecumenical organisation focusing on ecumenical networking in Slovakia. He is a member of the Order of Preachers. He is currently a student of theology at the Theological Institute CMBF in Kosice, Slovakia. He is a co-opted member of the European Regional Committee of WSCF. He co-edited the book *A Pentatonic Landscape. Central Europe, Ecology, Ecumenism* (Budapest, 2002); he is also an editor of *Mozaik*.

¹ KEKKONEN Urho, *Neutrality: The Finnish Position*. London, 1970. 108.

the Soviet Union and Finland. KEKKONEN, who in his political theory often applied personal virtues to political relations (e.g. the virtue of trust), distinguishes in this case between private virtues and the virtues of state. In other words, if an individual wants to behave in a responsible way towards the state, it is not enough just to act according to her or his private code of personal virtues. Virtues of state might require a broader approach or may even be contradictory to private virtues. In this case, the conflict concerned *personal justice* on one hand and *the security of the state* on the other.

KEKKONEN, who continuously stressed that security of small states, requires a very complex and cautious approach², refused to accept the virtues of state to be a mere projection of personal virtues on the state level. The system of values of a state does not follow the same line as the system of values of an individual. KEKKONEN claims that even the modes of action are different in the case of the individual and of the state. The individual can e.g. flee from danger, whereas the state cannot simply move away. Its position is set.

In this context it appears to be an utterly difficult task for a stateswoman/man to differentiate in her or his thinking between two overlapping but not identical value-systems: the value-system of personal morality and the value-system of the security of state.

The Notions of Danger and Sacrifice

One of the highest personal values is the value of one's own life. There are situations of danger in which individuals have to defend their mere existence. Nevertheless there are also situations in which individuals decide to sacrifice their lives for the good of their country, of other people, for their beliefs, etc. Self-sacrifice is in such cases considered a witness to one's ethical values and the person is denoted as martyr.

Henry KISSINGER claims that a statesman/woman, when she or he sees an approaching danger, has two basic possibilities – a) if he or she believes that the danger will continuously increase, she or he should try to eliminate it at its initial stage; b) if she or he believes, however, that the danger is just an outcome of a coincidental combination of circumstances, he or she should wait until it disappears.³

If the survival of the state is one of the primary tasks of the stateswoman/man, the question arises whether she or he is allowed to decide upon the death of the state (e.g. loss of independence). Furthermore the state is made up of a nation or nations. The statesman/woman is in certain emergency situations even charged with the utterly unenviable task of deciding upon the life or death of her or his own nation(s). Whether personal moral rules are to be applied in such situations for the nation is a question of considerable importance.

² Cf. KEKKONEN Urho, *Ekudden*. Borgå, 1981. 11-37.

³ Cf. KISSINGER Henry, *Umění diplomacie (Diplomacy)*. Praha. 197.

Cardinal Richelieu and the Theory of *Raison d'État*

The theory of *raison d'état* was formulated and applied by Armand Jean du Plessis Cardinal RICHELIEU, the Prime Minister of France in the years 1624-1642. The fundamental idea, on which the theory of *raison d'état* is based, is that the state constitutes its own reason. In other words, the state is not responsible to a higher instance, as the human individual is. Thus *the behaviour of the state is not to be derived from ethical rules practised by individuals. The state is not a moral entity.* Personal salvation and the ambitions of the state are based on completely different principles. The state is not immortal, it does not strive for eternal life. According to KISSINGER, RICHELIEU himself avoided mixing his personal salvation with his duties of a statesman⁴.

Since the success of the state is not to be based on personal ethical values of its statesmen/women, it has to be based on something else. In international politics ruled by the principles of power balance, which ensued from the theory of *raison d'état*, it is mostly based on strategic calculus and political intuition.

The rival of RICHELIEU during the Thirty Years War was FERDINAND II (HABSBURG). FERDINAND II acted as a politician on religious principles. Since he waged a religious war against the Protestants, it was impossible for him to see non-Catholics as potential allies. RICHELIEU, on the other hand, did not categorise states according to their religious profile. They were allies or enemies solely on the basis of the measure in which they opposed or supported the interests of France. In RICHELIEU's theory and practice the religious and the political formed two independent fields of involvement.

Dag Hammarskjöld's Spiritual Legacy

The Swedish politician and the second Secretary-General of the UN, Dag HAMMARSKJÖLD belongs undoubtedly to the important mystical figures of the 20th century. Brought up in a traditional Lutheran environment, HAMMARSKJÖLD got gradually acquainted with the mystical writers of the medieval period, such as Meister ECKHART, JOHN of the Cross or Thomas Á KEMPIS. His understanding of political activism was closely linked with his personal spiritual development, as he explained in his radio speech, *This I Believe* in 1953:

"The explanation of how a human should live a life of active social service in full harmony with oneself as a member of the community of the spirit, I found in the writings of those great medieval mystics for whom "self surrender" had been the way to self realisation, and who, in 'singleness of mind' and 'inwardness' had found the strength to say 'yes' to every demand, which the needs of their neighbours made them face, and to say 'yes' also, to every fate that life had in store for them, when they followed the call of duty, as they understood it. 'Love' that much misused and misinterpreted word, for them, meant simply an overflowing of strength which they felt themselves filled with when living in true self-oblivion.

⁴ Cf. *ibid.*, 58.

And this love found natural expressions in an unhesitant fulfillment of duty and in an unreserved acceptance of life, whatever it brought them personally of toil and suffering - or of happiness.”⁵

The quoted excerpt indicates that *HAMMARSKJÖLD* believed in the concept that political action of a stateswoman/man should be permeated by her or his personal spirituality and ethics. He himself was a living proof of this stance. His spiritual approach towards action in general can be seen in a number of records from his written legacy. In his spiritual diary, published under the title *Vägmärken* (*Markings*) he speaks of the *respect for the word* as the first step leading to an intellectual, emotional and moral maturity. He speaks of an inner love for truth as a *conditio sine qua non* (necessary condition) for the growth of the society⁶.

HAMMARSKJÖLD confessed on several occasions that an important source of his inspiration was the life and work of Albert SCHWEITZER, in whom he saw a vital interplay of contemplative spirituality and active social involvement. Personal spirituality and ethics of these two men constituted the basis from which their active life drew its inspiration and strength. Therefore any deeper study of their active involvement is to search for links with their inner life, too.

II. THE POLITICAL VS. THE ETHICAL

It is not the aim of the following paragraphs to capture the whole scope of potential conflicts between the ethical and the political identity of an individual. Nonetheless three basic stances are to be presented as hints for further consideration.

Compromise Unreached: Thomas More and the Act of Supremacy

It is not to be expounded within the framework of this essay how the conflict between HENRY VIII and Sir Thomas MORE (Lord Chancellor) originated. The official accusation, however, concerned the fact that MORE refused to give his consent to the *Act of Supremacy* passed by the Parliament, which stipulated that the head of the Church in England is the King or Queen of England. As a consequence of this Act of Parliament, the authority of the Roman Pontiff was no longer the highest authority for the English Church. More, whose opinion differed from that of the Parliament and of the King, found himself in an unenviable position, since an open rejection of the Act of Supremacy would be qualified as high treason. More decided to adopt the following stance: he refused to make public his opinion on the Act of Supremacy. Through this approach he was trying to remain loyal to both of his identities as long as possible. He maintained that he could not be charged, since the law could not be broken by silence, but required a provable dissent⁷. Even if his opinion was not difficult to guess, he did not reveal it until the verdict on him was spoken.

⁵ SÖDERBERG Sten, *Dag Hammarskjöld*. Stockholm, 1962. 101.

⁶ Cf. HAMMARSKJÖLD Dag, *Vejmärker* (*Markings*). København, 1965. 89.

⁷ Cf. FARROW John, *The Story of Thomas More*. 97. <http://www.cin.org/farmor>

It is obvious from the above-mentioned that MORE was avoiding an open conflict with the state. He was aware of the fact that he acted not only as a private person, but also as a public figure. His long-term silence was a sign to his adversaries that as a private person he was unable to compromise with his conscience, but as a public figure tried to avoid public distress and thus kept his opinion to himself. History proved, however, that his silence was dangerous enough. When sentenced, MORE declared that his personal ethics were in direct conflict with the Act of Supremacy. In the given situation a compromise between his religious identity and his political status could not be found anymore. His final choice was Either-Or.

Compromise Reached: Jozef Tiso's Theory of Lesser Evil

Dr. Jozef TISO was in the years 1939-1945 the President of Slovakia. After the war he faced the National Tribunal in Bratislava, accused of war crimes and collaboration with Nazi Germany. Since TISO was a Roman Catholic priest, the general public was interested in hearing his defence speech, which he delivered on March 17, 1947. In his *Apology*, TISO elaborated on the main points of his political involvement, explaining the ethics of his political behaviour. He maintained in several instances that his policy was to be seen in direct connection with his personal beliefs and his spiritual identity as a Roman Catholic priest⁸.

As TISO was frequently accused of violating basic Christian principles, he decided to elaborate on his compromises with the Nazi policies of the WWII. TISO stated that he saw his main role in reducing the impact of the war on the Slovak population. As a President of a small country, he claimed to have had an utterly limited space for manoeuvring and thus was often presented choices, in which he had to choose the less evil variant. He maintained that because of the lack of global influence, he could not live out his ideals as a free politician, but had to work with compromises that were often submitted to him in the form of a dictate. Nevertheless, he stuck to the ethics of lesser evil to prevent major evils from happening⁹. In other words, TISO's policy towards Nazi Germany was based on assessing potential dangers and potential damage. Instead of fighting for higher ideals connected with higher risk, TISO aimed his actions at achieving relatively least oppressive relations with Nazi Germany. He claimed that his political line was always formed on ethical principles and having the choices again he would have acted more or less the same way¹⁰. In other words, TISO followed a philosophical line similar to that of KEKKONEN, taking personal virtues as important guidelines, but basing concrete political steps also on a strategic calculation of given facts. He sought compromises between abstract laws of morality and pressing political conditions. Principles should prove *feasible*.

⁸ Cf. *Obhajovacia reč prezidenta Dr. Jozefa Tisu pred Národným súdom (The Defence Speech of President Dr. Jozef Tiso before the National Tribunal)*. Bratislava, 1996. 89.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 38, 82.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 82.

Impossibility of Compromise: The Suicide of Ivan Hribar

On April 18, 1941 the former Yugoslav senator, minister and mayor of the city of Ljubljana, Dr. Ivan HRIBAR died. He committed suicide in the centre of Ljubljana at the age of 90. On the bank of the river Ljubljanica his hat and his walking stick were found. In the note he left to his wife and daughter he stated: "My dear wife and you, my dearly loved Zlatica, forgive me. The stroke had proved to be too heavy, I could not bear it any longer."¹¹

The suicide of HRIBAR was an expression of his *deep sorrow* over the capitulation of Yugoslavia and the partition of Slovenia. In the days immediately preceding his death, Ljubljana was filled with Swastika-flags and Italian tricolors¹². HRIBAR, who was known as a balanced personality, saw at the age of 90 the ruins of his life-long efforts aimed at a cultural autonomy of the Slovenian nation and a free Yugoslavia. It seems that the whole of the ethical basis of HRIBAR's life was shattered by the occupation. It is impossible to say why exactly the whole construction of HRIBAR's values was crushed so brutally in those very days. One of the reasons could be that "the stroke" was so sudden and so strong. Nevertheless the action of HRIBAR shows that *he did not see any reasonable compromise anymore between the political reality and his potential ethical involvement*. The values of his, which were known to so many of his co-citizens, were suddenly overshadowed by the tragedy of his nation and he himself might have felt useless. His solution was unexpected and tragic, but it proved that the mystery of the human soul is at times known to God alone.

The above-mentioned examples capture just a part of the complex interplay between the ethical and the political identity of the individual. Nonetheless, they illustrate that the link between ethics and politics can be shaped in many different ways. They also show that ethical principles in their abstract form and given political reality often need a connecting element. How to connect these seemingly remote worlds is a matter of importance for those, who are involved in active political life and simultaneously cultivate their spiritual identity. How these two can be reconciled and how they can enrich and check each other, remains in many aspects still a *terra incognita* (unexplored area).

¹¹ Cf. HRIBAR Zlata, *Košček slovenske zgodovine (A Piece of Slovenian History)*. In *Homo sum... Ivan Hribar in njegova Ljubljana (Homo sum... Ivan Hribar and His Ljubljana)*. Ljubljana, 1997.

¹² Cf. MILČINSKI Lev, *Smrt Ivana Hribarja (The Death of Ivan Hribar)*. In *Samomor in samomorilni poskus v Sloveniji v letu 1996 (Suicide and Suicidal Attempts in Slovenia in the Year 1996)*. Ljubljana, 1996. 20.

Peter SAJDA:

La ética personal y la acción política

La teoría ética y la teoría política se presentan en ocasiones entrelazadas, complementarias o divergentes. En la historia podemos hallar situaciones y procesos en las que los individuos (políticos) presentan sus principios éticos, ya sea de una forma explícita (como afirmación), o implícita (como actitud). Los ejemplos que se analizan pretenden demostrar que la relación entre la ética y la política puede ser vista desde varios y diferentes puntos de vista, y que aún los políticos que alegan tener una misma herencia religiosa, no necesariamente comparten la misma opinión en la puesta en práctica de los principios éticos. La cuestión es cómo la ética y la política se influyen mutuamente en la vida de un político, y cómo ambas han de fundirse (si no del todo) para formar una base consistente para el comportamiento del homo politicus.

Peter SAJDA:

Éthique personnelle et action politique

Théorie éthique et théorie politique sont présentées, selon les époques, comme étant soit étroitement liées, soit complémentaires, soit divergentes. Néanmoins, dans toute situation et processus historique, il est possible de trouver des personnalités (politiques) qui ont manifesté leurs aspirations éthiques, que ce soit explicitement (par leurs déclarations) ou implicitement (par leur attitude). Les exemples analysés essayent de montrer que la relation entre l'éthique et la politique peut être considérée sous plusieurs angles et que même les hommes politiques qui se réclament d'un même héritage religieux ne partagent pas forcément la même opinion sur l'application des principes éthiques. La question qui se pose est de savoir comment l'éthique et la politique s'influencent et agissent l'une sur l'autre dans la vie d'un homme politique et comment les réunir (si nécessaire) afin de créer une base cohérente pour le comportement de l'homo politicus.