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Around the Understanding of Tradition and Authority. Family and the Challenges of Postmodernity

**Wokół rozumienia tradycji i autorytetu.
Rodzina a wyzwania ponowoczesności**

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Abstract

Introduction. The article analyses the problem of understanding tradition and perceiving authority in relation to the functioning of a family in the postmodern world. It lists the current challenges of postmodernity, which constitute a source of conditions for shaping the identity of subject entities and their ways of combining elements of tradition with the current educational reality.

Aim. The aim of the article is to review the problem of understanding tradition and authority from the perspective of constant socio-cultural transformations, and to indicate the significant challenges faced by humanity and the family. Theoretical analyses are based on materials combining philosophical, pedagogical, and sociological approaches, with particular emphasis on the anthropological perspective.

Methods and materials. The study uses the analysis of literature on the subject based

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on philosophical, sociological, and pedagogical theories and concepts. The diversity of approaches implies the use of pluralistic realism in the version proposed by Grobler (2006), as well as weak justificationism. The research problem is related to the question about ways of understanding tradition and authority in postmodernity and the conditions of their formation in society and the family.

Conclusion. The conclusions identify assumptions relevant to the problem, concerning social changes, perception of values, shaping identity, and, through them, the formation of a subjective and social image of tradition and authority. The context and conditions for shaping the ways of understanding them are outlined. The diversity of approaches to the concept of authority and the problem of knowledge about it, as well as the possibilities of the influence of external environments, are also indicated. The leading axis of the considerations is the concept of understanding, in relation to both tradition and authority. Furthermore, attention is drawn to the importance of this concept in building the system of values and identity of each entity, with particular emphasis on the family environment.

Keywords: understanding tradition, authority, identity, values, social change

Abstrakt

Cel. W artykule przeanalizowano problem rozumienia tradycji i postrzegania autorytetu w odniesieniu do funkcjonowania rodziny w świecie ponowoczesnym. Wskazano na obecne wyzwania ponowoczesności będące źródłem uwarunkowań dla kształtowania tożsamości podmiotów i ich sposobów łączenia elementów tradycji z obecną rzeczywistością wychowawczą. Celem artykułu jest przeglądowe rozważenie problemu rozumienia tradycji i autorytetu w perspektywie nieustannych zmian społeczno-kulturowych i wskazanie istotnych wyzwań, przed którymi stają człowiek i rodzina. Analizy teoretyczne oparto o materiały łączące podejścia filozoficzne, pedagogiczne i socjologiczne, ze szczególnym uwzględnieniem perspektywy antropologicznej.

Metody i materiały. Analiza literatury przedmiotu w oparciu o teorie i koncepcje filozoficzne, socjologiczne i pedagogiczne. Różnorodność podejść implikuje wykorzystanie realizmu pluralistycznego w wersji proponowanej przez Groblera (2006), a także słabego justyfikacjonizmu. Problem badawczy wiąże się z pytaniem o sposoby rozumienia tradycji i autorytetu w ponowoczesności oraz warunki ich kształtowania w społeczeństwie i rodzinie.

Wyniki i wnioski. We wnioskach wyłoniono założenia istotne dla problematyki dotyczące zmian społecznych, postrzegania wartości, kształtowania tożsamości, a poprzez nie formowania subiektywnego i społecznego obrazu tradycji i autorytetu. Zarysowano kontekst i warunki dla kształtowania sposobów ich rozumienia. Wskazano również na różnorodność podejść do pojęcia autorytetu oraz problem wiedzy o nim, a także na możliwości oddziaływania środowisk zewnętrznych. Za oś przewodnią rozważań przyjęto pojęcie rozu-

mienia zarówno w odniesieniu do tradycji, jak i autorytetu. Zwrócono uwagę na znaczenie tego pojęcia w budowaniu systemu wartości i tożsamości każdego podmiotu, ze szczególnym uwzględnieniem środowiska rodzinnego.

Słowa kluczowe: rozumienie tradycji, autorytet, tożsamość, wartości, zmiana społeczna

Introduction

The problem of understanding the surrounding reality is not something new in philosophical or pedagogical discourse. There are constant discussions on changes in defining concepts and describing socio-cultural phenomena, which are elements of building one's own image of postmodernity. The intensity of the ongoing transformations does not favour the clarity of perceiving the space of functioning of a human being as a subject, especially when it comes to their "being" in the family and the world of combining the old with the new.

The issue to be considered here will not be the family itself and the ways of perceiving it or describing its functioning, but the problems related to understanding what appears in the areas of individual and collective experience, and is related to tradition and the perception of authority. Questions about tradition and authorities are related to the entanglement of a human being in history, historicity, social and cultural "being," but also to their striving for a certain knowledge about themselves, which is, out of necessity, related to something, to reality, events, actions, objects or experiences acquired in the family environment.

Understanding tradition, which is the basis of upbringing and education processes, is an important aspect of building a living space. The matter seems obvious and clear, however, as Michalski states, considering the concept of understanding as proposed by Gadamer: "[...] we understand something only when our understanding can be communicated to others; understanding happens between people, not in the soul of an abstract, isolated individual [...]" (Michalski, 2022, p. 11).¹ Hence, understanding tradition has an interpersonal dimension and is associated with its presence in environments of human participation, such as family, school, *etc.* In relation to them, questions also arise about man, *i.e.*, authority, or rather, whether postmodernity brings the fall or rehabilitation of authority? Its perception depends on the individual and social understanding and interpretation of what is traditional in the world of everyday experience. This also includes myths and prejudices that often mark relationships, both familial

¹ Author's own translation.

and social. Understanding tradition and forming the image of authority is primarily based on the mental-emotional sphere, which means that it is shaped in relation to the relational conditions, primarily in the family. Meanwhile, the very understanding of the concept of family has been subject to redefinition and recontextualization on an interdisciplinary basis for many years, which would require a separate analysis. However, the fact of the continuous expansion of the scope of meaning of this concept indicates the diversity of conditions and the dynamics of life and relationality in postmodernity. It is worth pointing out—starting from the classical approach on the basis of social and cultural anthropology, according to which the family has the so-called characteristics of a primary group and is based, among other things, on: the recognition of natural blood ties, the possibility of determining the degree of kinship (*cf. e.g.*, Nowicka, 2006), while taking into account the functioning of “alternative forms of marital and family life” (*cf.* Kwak, 2001; Ostrowska, 2021; Slany, 2013; Urbańska, 2018) and changes in approaches to constructing bonds, understanding the relationship or family identity (*cf. e.g.*, Biernat, 2014; Kwak, 2001; Slany, 2013)—on the multiplicity of directions of analyses concerning the family. Since the term “postmodern family” also turns out to be problematic (Biernat, 2014), this text will rather focus on the family in postmodernity and its role in shaping ways of understanding and perceiving the world, including tradition and authority.

Therefore, the following questions appear: to what extent are understanding tradition and shaping the vision of authority, in a world of constant socio-cultural transformations, important for creating a complete picture of reality? And is it possible to clearly outline postmodern conditions related to understanding the significance of tradition for building identity and human functioning in social and cultural relations? And also, in what sense do experiences in the family environment condition ways of understanding tradition and authority?

Understanding Tradition as a Challenge for the Family in Postmodernity

The answers to the above questions are not simple, but the essence of any inquiry is always to refer to concepts already established in sciences and to recontextualise them in current conditions and in relation to the current state of affairs. This allows for the juxtaposition and connection of the already known threads with newly formed ones.

The question of the very understanding of tradition becomes fundamental. It is taken up on philosophical grounds by the aforementioned Gadamer, who combines understanding with an interpretive perspective in a hermeneutic approach, without which it is impossible to fully describe the structure of human embedding in relations

to the past, present, and future, and thus in relation to others. Assuming the need to perceive understanding as a complex process, he points to the role of imagination and interpretation as subjective factors that are part of the whole of thinking about tradition.

Understanding tradition and introducing it into the sphere of activity of society, and within it the family, is connected with the ability to recognise in it what is truly significant and originally meaningful (Gadamer, 2007). And this means not only that understanding requires imagination and the ability to interpret, but also the necessity to take into account and undertake the related possibilities of reading meanings and searching for meanings in all cultural content. As a result, the broader cognitive context, connected with the continuity of the transmission of tradition and the creative nature of the historical process, turns out to be important. According to Gadamer,

[...] time is in fact the carrier of the process in which what is contemporary is rooted. Therefore, time distance is not something that needs to be overcome. The naivety of historicism was expressed on the premise that one should move into the spirit of the era, think in its terms and not in one's own concepts and ideas, and that in this way one can achieve historical objectivity. Meanwhile, the point is to recognise time distance as a positive and creative possibility of understanding. (Gadamer, 2007, p. 408)²

This turns out to be important in the context of, for example, passing on tradition and embedding its elements in the structure of personality and identity of subject entities. The features of social space and attachment to the roots of the family functioning in it determine the quality of activities related to passing on tradition (local, regional, or national), forming the basis for shaping personality and a system of values (Bukowska-Floreńska, 2007).

Taking these elements into account allows for building one's own horizon of understanding, in which there is room for the clash of the past with the present and for designing the future in the conceptual and imaginative area. Subjective understanding here coincides with the ways of perceiving individual elements, aspects, and dimensions of the tradition that is being made present, which were introduced in the historical process. As Gadamer suggests, we can here speak of a truly creative nature of the historical process (2007). In it, a constantly modified set of impressions is created, related to experiencing events, reading symbols, learning about earlier rituals, ceremonies, behaviours, actions, *etc.*, as well as to shaping a system of values and the way of thinking about the world and other people.

Of course, one should not forget that at the root of all understanding lies a community of people who speak with each other, and thus live speech, which means

² Author's own translation.

something—only in the context of the situation in which it was used (see Michalski, 2022). This community should always be seen through language and situation. Only then does understanding become possible. As Gadamer highlights, “understanding tradition requires [...] certainly a historic horizon. However, this horizon is not achieved by putting yourself in a historical situation. You must rather have it before to gain the opportunity to put yourself in a situation” (Gadamer, 2007, p. 418).³ And this means the need to learn and see what was, and what is, in a situational perspective. This is probably a big challenge for people functioning in postmodernity, especially in relation to learning about tradition in the family environment and the related of interpreting it. Every action has both subjective and socio-cultural connotations, and every ritual or custom passed down from generation to generation becomes a “pattern” surrounded by interpretations and contexts, in which elements of the past, present, and future are combined (because the essence of traditional actions is to pass on meanings and senses). What does this entail for the subject participating in them? According to Gadamer:

We must introduce [...] ourselves to this different situation. [...] When we put ourselves, for example, in the situation of another person, we will understand them, *i.e.*, become aware of their otherness, and even their irreducible individuality, precisely because we put ourselves in their situation, which will result in rising to a higher generality [...]. (Gadamer, 2007, p. 418)

It allows us to perceive things, actions, attitudes, ceremonies, rituals, all elements passed on in a given tradition, in a broader perspective, taking into account not only the historical, socio-cultural background, but also the ethical, aesthetic, or linguistic one. The awareness of “being” in a world marked by constant changes and expanding spaces of influence (as in the area of communication activities in the information society) promotes openness in reading messages and content resulting from tradition, while simultaneously comparing them with the constructs of modernity and postmodernity. This applies, for example, to reading and internalizing values related to various types of holidays, beliefs, customs, and consequently symbols, the meaning of which is most often discovered directly in the family circle, slowly reaching the understanding of what has been called tradition, and what combines the past with the technological and virtualized present, as well as the global social perspective with the subjective sphere of feelings and experiences.

What turns out to be important, as Gadamer suggests, is the horizon of modernity, which is constantly being shaped. And it does not take shape without the past (Gadamer, 2007). As he emphasises,

³ Author’s own translation.

there is no horizon of modernity for itself, just as there are no historical horizons that could be reached. Rather, understanding is always a process of merging such horizons that supposedly exist for each other. [...] In the sphere of tradition, such merging occurs continuously. (Gadamer, 2007, p. 420) ⁴

It can be assumed that the understanding of tradition as a process of combining coexisting horizons is constantly being formed and updated, and the place where this process becomes present is the family, the closest relational space of the subject entity.

This raises questions: to what extent are these horizons learned in the family circle? Can the family provide full access to them and open up to the diversity of interpretations of the past, but also projections of the future? And to what extent does the family in the postmodern world of multitudes support the axiological development of children and young minds? The questions remain open, at the same time giving expression to the emerging new challenges for the family (e.g., Leśniak-Walczyk, 2022). They are also associated with threats, among which some of the basic ones are, as Ostrowska suggests, underestimating family traditions (Ostrowska, 2018, 2021) and a lack of sufficient knowledge about the threats to the functioning of the family (Ostrowska, 2021). Without knowledge and roots, a young person's subjectivity has limited opportunities to learn and, consequently, build a full picture of reality.

Tradition and Postmodern Identity

It is impossible to consider the problems of the postmodern world without taking into account identity issues, and especially the formation and updating of the identity of entities that build this world. It is identity that constitutes the field of axiological development. It can be considered both the basis and the effect of all actions, which makes it difficult to create definitions, but indicates continuity, which turns out to be an important property of every identity.

Giddens draws attention to the formation of an individual's identity, emerging from the clash of individual trust and self-awareness with the external world (Giddens, 2012). However, it is not "[...] simply something given as a result of the continuity of its activity, but something that must be routinely produced and maintained by a reflectively acting individual" (Giddens, 2012, p. 79).⁵ More precisely—in his understanding—it is the "self" understood by the individual in biographical categories, taking into account the aforementioned assumption of continuity in time and space.

⁴ Author's own translation.

⁵ Author's own translation.

This makes the identity of the individual—a reflective interpretation of such continuity, and this in turn assumes a cognitive element of being a “person” (Giddens, 2012).

This can be seen as a challenge for the family environment. Shaping a relatively stable identity requires early trust relationships and developing a so-called protective cocoon, associated with a sense of security and gaining social bonds. A person with such an identity, as Giddens writes, is able to recognise their own value. Nevertheless, the family environment can also support the formation of a weak or broken identity. Because their “subjectively constructed biography,” as he emphasises, is not related to their behaviour or how they are perceived by others, but to their ability to maintain the continuity of a specific narrative (Giddens, 2012). An important aspect of this continuity also turns out to be the fact that everyone introduces fragments and elements of the external world into this biography, which they arrange according to themselves, creating specific identity narratives (*cf.* MacIntyre, 1996; Taylor, 2001). And these can have a diverse nature.

He bases the construction of an individual’s identity on the so-called existential questions, concerning the fundamental aspects of the life of each subject entity. In addition to the aforementioned continuity of identity, which is an everlasting sense of “being a person”, he includes such issues as: experiencing others, existence, and being as the identity of things and events, or the finitude of human life (Giddens, 2012).

A slightly different approach is proposed by Fukuyama, who points to the possibility of forming a multiple, diverse, and variable identity (Fukuyama, 2019). Referring to Taylor’s thought, he states that identity is an arriving moral idea, crossing borders and cultures, but authentic and striving to recognise one’s own “self” and the dignity associated with it (Fukuyama, 2019). Fluidity and changeability—in its area—are associated with a person’s constant search for an authentic identity, allowing them to maintain bonds with others. This is a constant striving for places and communities that give a sense of freedom and freedom of choice, an escape from traditional forms of being and striving for modernity, and then again, a search for connections with ancestors and their orderly lives (*cf.* Fukuyama, 2019). As he writes,

[...] the nature of contemporary identity is that it is changeable and [...] the condition of modernity is to have multiple identities, shaped by our social interactions on any number of levels. We have identities defined by our race, gender, place of work, education, preferences, and nationality. For many teenagers, it is formed around a specific subgenre of music [...]. (Fukuyama, 2019, pp. 203–204) ⁶

⁶ Author’s own translation.

Regardless of the way in which one manifests one's own identity, everyone—especially in the area of family or education—should opt for using forms of mutual respect in relationships. This requires linking identity with important ideas, such as equality or openness, freedom and responsibility, law or integration (*cf. e.g.*, Kochanowska & Miczka-Pajestka, 2020).

The challenge for families in postmodernity is the very formation of their own identities, because—as Fukuyama suggests—it is impossible to avoid thinking about society in identity categories. And family ties usually (at least in the common sense) deepen them, but it is necessary to remember that the identity deeply rooted in us is neither permanent nor necessarily given to us by origin (Fukuyama, 2019). Moreover, identity can be used to divide, but also, as in the past, to integrate. This will ultimately be the cure for the populism of our times (Fukuyama, 2019).

The challenge of shaping young minds to fully participate in culture does not only concern the family environment, but also the school, which often seems to favour the exclusion of some areas of culture, or popular culture in general, as a source of identity. Melosik emphasises that one can notice “pedagogical efforts” to exclude popular culture as that very source. Nevertheless, these efforts cannot bring results due to the current immersion of reality in that culture. This makes competences that allow young people to move freely in its areas are necessary for identity and society (Melosik, 2018). Young people acquire them independently, as if in the process of self-education (2018). Meanwhile, school “[...] has ceased to be a platform for significant «cultural socialisation». It ignores [...] the goal of shaping a rich, wise, critical identity or personality” (Melosik, 2018, p. 29).⁷

A significant challenge is therefore to attempt to bridge the gap that appears between the expectations of young minds and the current pedagogical and educational offer. While in the context of education, solutions require systemic actions that help shape it as a prospectively oriented system (Zacher, 2011), in relation to the family environment, what counts is rather bottom-up action, related to the functioning of each entity in an individualized way and based on the pursuit of understanding (especially within interpersonal communication, *cf.* Gadamer, 2022). After all, these are spaces for building identity, within which the entity strives to recognise its own dignity in a diverse, multicultural, and fluid world.

It is also a problem of migrant children and their sense of dignity and identity. Young minds are forced to find their own roots in a new space of life and, at the same time, learn about and experience—overcoming barriers—what is foreign. The path of knowledge always leads through diverse images of the world presented by the people around them (family, peers, neighbours, teachers, *etc.*) and requires experiencing tradition and the in-

⁷ Author's own translation.

fluence of authorities. At the interface of different traditions, a diverse image of the world is formed—requiring open-mindedness—which does not really provide the opportunity to consolidate one’s own strong identity and strengthen one’s sense of dignity. It is also often associated with the loss of authority or the creation of a situation of lack of permanent foundations for defining them.

It becomes important to notice social changes that favour reformulations in the ways of perceiving tradition and authority.

Transformations of Authority and Social Change

As Castells (2013) suggests, social change is associated with action, individual and/or collective, which is fundamentally emotionally motivated, as is the whole of human behaviour. Hence, all models of social movements are based on emotions, more or less common goals and values, or references to other initiatives that can be inspiring, and a communication community (see Castells, 2013). Nevertheless, the change associated with the transformation of ways of perceiving tradition, including traditionally understood authority, concerns many levels of human existence. Apart from the new spaces of autonomy, spontaneity or unity that drive social movements, the above-mentioned emotions (fear, disgust, surprise, sadness, joy, or anger – as Ekman, 1973; Neuman *et al.*, 2007, pointed out) come to the fore in individual action, the disclosure of which helps to involve the individual in collective actions.

Considering the transformation of social structures, among others related to cultural diversity, migration movements, globalisation, virtualisation, hybridisation of reality, *etc.*, it is worth paying attention to the issue of migrant children, as those whose learning of traditions and recognition of authorities has been made difficult by adults. The integration of immigrants with the national culture of the country receiving them is a complex process, extremely difficult in terms of the emotional and cognitive sphere, and rarely supported systemically. And children in the concepts of migration are—as Albański emphasises—“deprived of their subjectivity, which is why migration researchers, when they have to describe the situation of a migrant child, focus on the most important institutions of primary and secondary socialisation—family and school” (Albański, 2018, p. 157).⁸ They are reduced, as he writes further, to passive observers, objects of concern for adaptation and assimilation to the standards of the society receiving them (*cf.* Albański, 2018). This is important in forming their identity and searching for authorities. However, it is a problem for separate analyses.

⁸ Author’s own translation.

In these considerations regarding the ways of perceiving what is traditional, including authority, it should be emphasised that the very concept of authority raises a number of questions and doubts. Its understanding is not unambiguous. The question, therefore, arises as to whether we can speak of a change in the way of perceiving and understanding authority, since there was previously no unanimity in defining it? What kind of change can we speak of?

It seems that the change concerns rather the context, background, socio-cultural perspective, marked by a number of transformations taking place in postmodern societies, especially in connection with the virtualisation and technicalisation of reality, than the concept itself. It is embedded in them and modelled from the bottom-up, in relation to the individual subject and the conditions of their functioning and experiencing the world. Nevertheless, if the change takes place in the social and cultural space, it affects the family environment, conditioning the areas of its participation in which the family experiences multiplicity and diversity, generating challenges and revealing threats (Kwak, 2001, 2005; Ostrowska, 2021).

In scientific analyses, there are diverse voices indicating the multiplicity of factors and aspects of forming, shaping, and defining what is called authority. Rewera draws attention to two tendencies outlined in his approach, namely: the first is related to the recognition of the voluntary subordination of an individual to a distinguished person or institution as the source of understanding authority; and the second—with the assumption that authority is a product of the community, which in this way aims to maintain social order (Rewera, 2022). The first approach emphasises, as does Witkowski, among others, the importance of a critical approach to values and individualisation in building the image of authority and the role of independent and grassroots action (Witkowski, 2011), as well as rational and critical assessment of the situation (Rewera, 2022). Meanwhile, in the second approach, authority becomes a tool of enslavement, pressure and coercion (Rewera, 2022).

Thus, it can be perceived in two ways, both in the social perspective—as a collective product, and in the individual, subjective perspective—as a feature of an individual (Rewera, 2022; see also Wagner, 2005). On the one hand, in a broad sense and taking into account the future perspective, it becomes a screen on which the most dramatic events take place, concerning the fate of Western culture and civilisation (Witkowski, 2011). On the other hand, actualising itself in the subject's actions, the authority becomes a living model of competence in matters that are important for efforts to settle in the social environment or maintain identity (Wagner, 2005).

Each of these approaches is based on the emotional aspect of being in the world and focusing on a value, or set of values, such as dignity, respect, or recognition. Their foundation is trust, without which there are no subjective relations and the pursuit of agreement. Through it, the subject comes to understand authority. Of course,

it is complex and largely dependent on the knowledge a given person has at a given time about those aspects of reality that condition the formation of the image or vision of authority. Some elements are known directly, others only through description. It can be assumed that, apart from the emotional sphere, which is an impulse for human choices and individual and social actions, knowledge about the surrounding reality, values, truths that are important for subjective interpersonal relations, is important in perceiving and understanding both tradition and authority.

Direct knowledge is connected with the knowledge of individual entities and universals. Depending on what is known, it is inferred whether it concerns sensory data (as in the case of individual entities) or sensory features, spatial and temporal relations, abstract universals, or similarity (when it concerns universals). In turn, derivative knowledge of things, known as knowledge by description, requires—as Russell writes—“both direct knowledge and knowledge of truths,” while “direct knowledge of truths may be called intuitive knowledge, and truths known in this way—self-evident truths” (Russell, 2003, p. 122).⁹ The subject’s knowledge, therefore, consists of everything that can be inferred from self-evident truths; this concerns what is given by the senses, but also certain abstract logical principles and certain ethical judgments (Russell, 2003). Thus, talking about the understanding of authority is basically an indication of the process of forming a certain abstract image, based on various types of knowledge, taking into account individual and social emotionality and oriented towards a certain value.

In cognition and the mentioned formation, the recognition of the subject’s will to submit to authority, *i.e.*, a kind of voluntariness, turns out to be essential. It cannot be denied that real authority consists in the voluntary recognition of the value of a given person or the significance of a given institution, and authority based solely on physical or moral coercion is problematic and transitory, recognized only seemingly and with the breakdown of authoritative factors and the cessation of coercion, authority disintegrates and disappears (Rowid, 1957).

So, are social changes also visible in the perception and understanding of authority? This cannot be clearly stated, however, both social movements making changes and individuals shaping their own way of perceiving authority refer to emotions, possessed knowledge, and are guided by a certain sense of values. The essence of social changes, which are important in understanding tradition and authority, as well as changes in their perception, are two elements: influence and values (*cf.* Bauman, 1996). Bauman emphasizes the importance and role of authority in social and individual life, linking this to the possibility of an individual influencing the choices of values in other people.

⁹ Author’s own translation.

The key to such a relationship is trust. Thanks to it, each entity is willing to make a choice of values under the influence of another person. As he writes:

We call the ability to influence other people's choice of values authority and it is expressed only in the fact of such influence, while obedience to authority can be justified by various factors: wisdom, truthfulness, experience, moral seriousness, but it is common that people who recognise it trust the fundamental correctness of the instructions they receive. (Bauman, 1996, pp. 125–126) ¹⁰

Nevertheless, each choice is individual and is based on the moral responsibility of each subject entity. According to Bauman, this is a chance for a new beginning of the social ethics of postmodernity, which is currently struggling with the crisis of the authority of reason and commonly accepted ethical codes. Despite everything, what may be a chance to shape the ethical future is that which is morally weak, *i.e.*, the individual conscience. This naturally raises concerns, as he writes: “Conscience does not have in its arsenal any of the weapons recognised in the modern world as the insignia of authority” (Bauman, 2012, p. 386).¹¹ Recognising it as a weapon for building the future of societies in a world of risk and threats seems naive. However, the conscience of the subject entity is based on moral responsibility, which, being the most personal and inalienable human freedom and the most valuable of human rights, is unconditional and infinite and precedes all decisions (Bauman, 2012).

Moral responsibility, revealing itself in the constant anxiety that it does not reveal itself enough, constantly makes itself known and—as Bauman suggests—needs neither assurances that it is right, nor justifications for being what it is (Bauman, 2012). In this way, it turns out to be the only constant point of reference for the subject entity in a fluid world.

It can be assumed that taking care of the development of a conscious sense of moral responsibility should be the basic task of the family environment. What is most primary in human morality—conscience and its moral responsibility—gives the possibility of creating subjective relations in the family, and consequently in institutions and further in societies and cultures.

Vattimo (2020) also writes about the necessity of accepting subjectivity in its weak version, drawing attention to the difficult situation of a person facing the loss of old certainties, abandoning the dominance of reason and the simultaneous inability to establish new universal values (Duchliński *et al.*, 2022). As emphasised by the authors of the book *Etyka a problem podmiotu* [Ethics and the problem of the subject entity],

¹⁰ Author's own translation.

¹¹ Author's own translation.

analysing Vattimo's concept, it seems that there cannot be one moral lantern, because it would mean a form of domination and violence of one aspect of reality over others (Duchliński *et al.*, 2022). Meanwhile, according to the mentioned philosopher,

[...] what is desirable is [...] the local nature of ethics and tradition, as well as reducing the validity of the ethical system to local horizons, within the limits of the tradition of which ethics is an expression. Reality is therefore configured as a multitude of local ethics. (Duchliński *et al.*, 2022, p. 246; see also Vattimo, 2020)

The problem of understanding tradition and authority is based on postmodernist assumptions: the departure from the dominance and centralisation of reason in perceiving and describing reality, thus losing a permanent axiom and liberating from uniform and stable rationality, as well as the impossibility of establishing universal ethics of conduct, the presence of weak thought and weak subjectivity. Although there are voices in favour of global ethics, based on the expansion of a sense of moral compassion and moral obligations towards other people, as a solution for the technological world (Mahbubani, 2020), Vattimo's vision of postmetaphysical ethics, emphasizing the issues of openness, as well as consensus and the possibility of negotiation, may become a project for postmodern thinking about the subject entity and their understanding in the perspective of tradition and social change. The subject should, in turn, be the starting point for building subjective relations based on the equivalence of the parties participating in it, their autonomy and openness, allowing for a positive and creative possibility of understanding tradition in relation to the historical horizon (Gadamer, 2007), as well as for shaping the image of authority in relation to ethical values and principles.

Conclusion

Environmental and social impact, and one's own value system, provide a basis for forming diverse ways of understanding tradition and authority. Moreover, they constitute a challenge for families as transmitters of values and builders of areas of influence. Families as groups of diverse people and personalities, with different ways of thinking and worldviews, while at the same time uniting entities in their focus on common goals and tasks (*e.g.*, educational), are to create a field for transmitting tradition (values, customs, rituals, symbols, language, meanings, content important to the community, *etc.*). This formation of the space of transmission is already a challenge, especially in the world of fluidity and uncertainty, or in the risk society, whose domain is the reorganisation of social space (compare: Bauman, 2012). Uncertainty,

cruelty, or helplessness in the current world of wars and crisis of moral responsibility create a background for the recontextualization of the concepts of tradition and authority.

Regardless of the subjective conditions of perceiving authority, it can be assumed that it is

[...] an axiological category, a carrier of specific values that are respected and significant in a given socio-cultural context. Questioning certain values also means questioning the legitimacy of authorities. However, there is no place for a vacuum in social life. Authorities that have lost their model-forming function are replaced by others. (Rewera, 2022, p. 199)¹²

The diversity of approaches and knowledge about them, as well as the impact of external environments, reveal their significance for the system of values and identity of each entity, with particular emphasis on the family environment. The political-corporate-cultural perspective is also becoming extremely important, due to the marketisation of education, and therefore the need to build—to counterbalance conformist corporatism—authorities based on relationality, criticism, and commitment, but also openness to change and dialogue. This also applies to the educational space, as the one from which constructive relationality, openness and dialogue are expected, *i.e.*, it is expected to provide conditions for authorities to reveal themselves and reality does not reflect these expectations (*cf.* Kochanowska & Miczka-Pajestka, 2020).

The search for open authority has long been pursued in the field of radical pedagogy, assuming that the necessity of an authority “which can bring hope, «authorizes special relations» between an individual and their social environment, understanding, like Ricoeur, that hope is «the main source of weapons against closing the future»” (Witkowski, 2010, p. 436).¹³ As Witkowski writes, “the authority that radical pedagogy wants to develop must be able to combine hope and education, leaving the potential of human creativity constantly open, and seeing progress in the ability to question oneself” (Witkowski, 2010, p. 436).¹⁴ However, this cannot be achieved without striving to understand tradition, values, recognition of the subject entity and their identity, formed to a large extent in the family environment and the spaces of participation that permeate them. And consequently, also without the need to form dialogical relations, both in the family environment and in the institutional, school, social, and cultural environments (*cf. e.g.*, Kochanowska & Miczka-Pajestka, 2024).

¹² Author’s own translation.

¹³ Author’s own translation.

¹⁴ Author’s own translation.

Therefore, in response to the question posed earlier, it seems possible to partially outline postmodern conditions related to understanding the importance of tradition for building identity and human functioning in social and cultural relations. As these are subject to constant changes and modifications related to technologicalisation, new areas of influence (including media, virtual), combining and interpenetration of cultural elements, formation of global ethics, *etc.* (see Kochanowska & Miczka-Pajestka, 2020). In this perspective, the family becomes a source of identity aspirations and attitudes, perception of authorities, understanding tradition, as well as shaping the ability to view and assess reality, its requirements, and challenges.

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