

Inequality as a challenge in the Western cultural and civilizational paradigm

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ABSTRACT

The article focuses on the problem of social inequality in the Western cultural and civilizational paradigm. It is noted that in the history of Western philosophy and culture, there have always been two different approaches to understanding inequality. The first path of elitism involved the apology for inequality, proposing ideas of aristocracy (inequality within a single society) or racial domination (inequality between peoples and civilizations). This philosophical tradition can be called traditional-authoritarian (Plato, Aristotle) or romantic-conservative (H. Chamberlain). The second way is egalitarian, which insists on creating a society built on the idea of equality (the philosophy of liberalism and Marxism). If representatives of the liberal wing of egalitarianism (Locke, Bentham) focus on the justification of a society of equal opportunities with an emphasis on natural human rights, the tradition of Marxism tends to consider social contradictions caused by inequality as antagonistic. Therefore, protest, revolution, rebellion become a specifically Western way of eradicating inequality (Marx, Camus). At the same time, the article notes that the deep worldview basis of this way of solving the problem of inequality is the nihilistic nature of Western civilization, its "Faustian spirit" (Spengler).

KEYWORDS

inequality, struggle for equality, egalitarianism, antagonistic contradictions, revolution, existential rebellion, nihilism, "Faustian type".

Introduction

Since ancient times, social inequality has been and remains a great moral challenge for humanity, because it affects the issues of a fair social system, human rights and freedoms. We should start with the fact that Western culture does not have unanimity on the issue of social equality. Western philosophical reflection is not monolithic and homogeneous. From the very beginning, two "lines of philosophizing" co-existed in the Western history of ideas. One philosophical tradition affirms equality as the basic worldview, moral and legal principle of building society. While the other one, on the contrary, is based on the principle of inequality. Therefore, two lines of Western philosophizing can be conditionally distinguished as: elitist and egalitarian.

The purpose of the article: to consider the problem of social inequality in the Western cultural and civilizational paradigm through the prism of egalitarian and elitist traditions of philosophical thought; to analyze the deep worldview and existential origins of the idea of struggle for equality.

Research methods

Our preliminary working hypothesis is as follows: Western cultural and civilizational optics consider social contradictions that arise as a result of existing cultural, political, economic, religious (and so on) forms of inequality as irreconcilable or antagonistic. In this case, we will rely on the methodology of Marxism. Antagonism within Marxist framework is interpreted as one of the types of contradictions of social development. From the point of view of the Marxist approach, "contradictions acquire an antagonistic character when opposite, incompatible interests of different social communities' clash... Antagonistic contradictions

inevitably intensify, escalate, turn into a conflict, and can be resolved only by eliminating one of the parties to the conflict" (Ilyenkov, 1975: URL). A vivid example of an antagonistic contradiction is class antagonism as an irreconcilable contradiction of the main interests of social classes, which leads sooner or later to a social revolution.

For the Western worldview, existing contradictions generated by inequality are polarized, and therefore inevitably lead to conflict, which is resolved in a violent way: through armed confrontation, revolution, etc. We can remember the conflict between Guelph and Ghibellines, Catholics and Protestants, monarchists and republicans, bourgeoisie and proletariat, etc. in European history. Therefore, it is natural that Western philosophizing problematizes the themes of nihilism, rebellion, strike, violence, and the struggle for equality (Morozov, 2018).

At the same time, in the article, we will look for the deep worldview origins of this Western idea of the struggle for equality. We will rely, first, on the existential analysis of the human personality, presented by Albert Camus, in which rebellion is considered as a way to overcome and compensate the absurd situation in which human existence is abandoned (Camus, 2018). Secondly, we will take into account the methodology of the "morphology of civilizations" by O. Spengler, who characterizes Western culture, its soul in general as a "Faustian type", and accordingly interpret the problem of social inequality based on its features (Spengler, 1991). Thirdly, we take into consideration the comparative civilizational method of Arnold Toynbee (1963) and Shmuel Eisenstadt (1978), as well as the methodological principle of "response and challenge", which will allow us to see the revolution as a constitutive feature of Western civilization, that can be considered as a specifically Western "response" to existing "challenges" of social inequality. This once again

proves the original hypothesis of our work about the antagonistic nature of the resolution of contradictions within the Western civilizational paradigm.

Results and Discussion

The egalitarian tradition of European philosophical thought claims that inequality, which is quite natural for the culture of the East, contradicts the European (and especially the modern European) worldview, the very "spirit of Europe". It is not without reason that the ideas of democracy, egalitarianism and cosmopolitanism (whose supporters could be found among representatives of the ancient Greek philosophical schools: Sophists, Sceptics, Cynics, Epicureans) were born in the bowels of European thought, contrary to Eastern despotism. From the point of view of the egalitarian approach, the idea of equality conditioned the cultural landscape of the Western world from the very beginning of its existence, from its very origins. Therefore, it is not difficult to connect the prerequisites for the appearance of philosophical (rational, abstract-logical, reflective) thinking in ancient times precisely with the social conditions of the ancient Greek polis, in the public space of which an attempt was made to implement the democratic principle of social equality. In this regard, modern Ukrainian researcher M. Lipin notes that "the high status of rational thinking in the ancient Greek polis was due to the specifics of its socio-political system" (*Lipin, 2020: 7*). Non-dogmatic (critical) philosophical thought, in contrast to myth, is possible, as M. Lipin claims, in a "situation of the destruction of rigid power hierarchies" (*Lipin, 2020: 7*), where there is no tyranny, and where democracy reigns. In turn, social life reflected the philosophical idea of "the cosmos as a whole, the world system as such, which is built on the basis of symmetry, balance and equality of all elements" (*Lipin, 2020: 7*). It is possible to develop M. Lipin's opinion further and assume that if the ancient Greek city-state of Athens had not been a social space for the coexistence of equal citizens, where access to the highest public positions was open regardless of the property status, then philosophical studies would hardly have received such high position. And if philosophy had not received its status, then the transition from the mythological-religious to the scientific worldview ("axial time" according to K. Jaspers) would not have taken place.

It would seem that the analysis of ancient Greek culture from this point of view confirms the correctness of the egalitarian approach. However, if we take a closer look at the realities of the ancient world, we will understand that democracy and social equality in the city-state (polis) was quite different from the standards and criteria of modern democracy. In the popular morality of ancient Greeks, it was quite normal that women, foreigners, and slaves could not participate in public political life (*Dover, 1974*). Moreover, the classics of ancient philosophical thought, primarily Plato and Aristotle, had a negative attitude towards democracy as a form of government and were obviously apologists for the idea of social inequality and hierarchy. That's why Karl Popper's claimed them to be "enemies of open society" (*Popper, 1994*). Therefore, on the one hand, the egalitarian approach is correct in that the political and social environment of ancient city-state created favourable conditions for the emergence of democratic (rational, pluralistic) philosophical thinking. And on the other hand, the elitist approach shows that reflective philosophical thought, asking about the primary cause of the world, the absolute beginning of all existence, and absolute truth, appealed to authoritarian hierarchical constructions that contradict the

democratic principles of polis life. We can recall here the theories of society and morality of Plato and Aristotle in which "equal treatment could be given only for equal men" (*Vlastos, 1981: 193*).

We observe the same ambivalence of equality and inequality in later socio-philosophical theories of Modern Age, the Age of Enlightenment, and in the 19th century. Inequality was problematized and became in the focus of attention of scientists, but it cannot be said that all of them were unanimous supporters of egalitarianism. If you look at European philosophical thought in that period of time, the egalitarian approach is represented, first of all, by the thinkers of the Enlightenment era. In this context, we can't but mention the doctrine of I. Kant about the general "eternal peace" and the moral condemnation of war. Modern Ukrainian researcher V. Gusiev interprets Kant, saying that the conditions for eternal peace are the idea of a universal legal order, the voluntary and conscious submission of all people to the law and the creation of a voluntary union of peoples and states. "So-called federalism of free states recognizes the right to self-determination, sovereignty and equality of all people" (*Gusiev, 2000: 12*).

The representatives of egalitarianism in the epoch of Enlightenment include J. Locke, a bright apologist of liberalism and innate human rights, J. St. Mill and J. Bentham, the founders of utilitarianism. In Locke's concept, the common existence of people, even before the emergence of the state, always presupposes the existence of certain legal relations regulated by natural law. Natural law means that every person has rights that are inalienable and that state power cannot change: 1) life and health; 2) the pursuit of happiness according to one's own idea of the good; 3) owning the results of one's work. "The purpose of law is not to destroy and limit, but to preserve and extend liberty" (*Locke, 1988*). Ukrainian researcher V. Nechyporenko notes that "For Locke, the state is legitimate to the extent that it is able to maintain the legal order that protects human freedom and the equal rights of all its citizens." (*Nechyporenko, 2013*). Another thinker of Enlightenment J. Bentham looked at equality from a utilitarian point of view based on the principle of happiness. An individual in his pursuit of happiness, guided by his own ideas, must take into account the same legitimate pursuits of happiness of other individuals. Therefore, the basis of the organization of social and political and legal life of society for Bentham is freedom combined with equality. It is known that J. Bentham was a supporter of women's equality, the expansion of suffrage and advocated the abolition of slavery (*Bentham, 2018*).

Generally speaking, the progressive liberal tradition of philosophical thought, rooted in the Enlightenment ideals of freedom, equality and fraternity and laissez-faire capitalism, advocated the equality of all peoples, because inequality contradicted the liberal idea of free trade (freedom of the market, limited by minimal government intervention) and unlimited competition. The principle of equality was also perfectly consistent with utilitarianism ("maximum happiness for the maximum number of individuals").

On the other hand, on the territory of post-Enlightenment Europe, there were certain intellectual trends, which can generally be characterized as anti-liberal and elitist. So, for example, in the 19th century there were popular racist and social-Darwinist theories of the French sociologists Joseph Gabineau ("Essay on the inequality of human races"), and Georges Lapouge ("The Aryan. His social role"), as well as the German linguist and anthropologist H. Günter ("Racial science of the German people"), which

were later taken as the basis of policy and ideology of the Third Reich. According to this racial theory of inequality, the Aryan (Nordic) spirit created all outstanding cultural and civilizational achievements, and accordingly the Aryan race was declared the highest in spiritual terms, while the contribution of other races to world culture is much less. It was an example of pseudo-scientific justification of ethnocentrism, eugenics and inequality. Instead of the Kantian "eternal peace" of equal peoples, the opposite idea of "eternal struggle" of unequal races and civilizations for domination was proposed. Later, at the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, in the intellectual and artistic life of Europe, anti-liberal ideas that defended the idea of inequality intensified. Here we should briefly recall the views on racial and civilizational inequality of the famous British writers and poets of that time, H. Chamberlain and R. Kipling. It is noteworthy, that for Europe at that time, especially for its conservative circles, chauvinistic views focusing on the original inequality of peoples and races were commonplace. English writer Houston Chamberlain was a prominent apologist of racial inequality and white supremacy. He believed that the basis of the spiritual is the biological; the morality or immorality of a person depends on what blood flows in his veins (*Chamberlain, 1912*). In the work "Foundations of the Nineteenth Century", Chamberlain gave a religious interpretation of the cultural and political antagonism between the Semitic and Nordic races, which should end in a final apocalyptic battle and the victory of the forces of good (represented by the Nordic race) over universal evil (represented by the Jews). As the German sociologist and historian M. Sarkisyanz notes in his work "Hitler's British Inspirers", "such ideas of National Socialism as: selection, hierarchy of races, racial selection for world domination were taken from works of Chamberlain" (*Sarkisyanz, 2003: 10*).

In a certain period of his work, the poet and writer R. Kipling also shared the ideas of racial and civilizational inequality and white supremacy. In his poem "The White Man's Burden" (1899), he poeticized the politics of colonization. In this work, the author painted the image of non-European peoples: savage, dark, lazy and stupid, in need of the power and guardianship of white Europeans:

Take up the White Man's burden –
Send forth the best ye breed –
Go bind your sons to exile
To serve your captives' need;
To wait in heavy harness
On fluttered folk and wild –
Your new-caught, sullen peoples,
Half devil and half child. (*Kipling, 1899*)

So, let's emphasize once again that in the European intellectual environment, two positions, two opposite points of view on the problem of social equality have always coexisted: egalitarian (liberal-progressive) and elitist (anti-liberal, romantic-conservative). We can say that from a certain time in European history, after the defeat of Nazi ideology, the egalitarian position became dominant, and the elitist position became marginal.

The equality-inequality opposition in the Western tradition: an antagonistic model of conflict resolution

Egalitarianism problematized social inequality, proposed equality as a moral ideal. This means that equality has become not just an idea, but a social task, a meta-narrative: something that does not exist in reality, but that society has to acquire. It follows from this that the problems of equality and inequality in Western culture appeared not

only in theoretical attempts to describe and justify an egalitarian society (in social-utopian projects, declarations, manifestos, etc.), but also primarily in the effective and practical plane. Inequality became a challenge that had to be actively overcome. In Western history there could be found a huge number of political movements against various forms of inequality (social, economic, political, religious, national, racial, gender, and so on). We would venture to say that one of the characteristic features of Western civilization was the resolution of social problems and contradictions through active resistance, protests, uprisings that turned into riots, revolutions, etc.

Israeli sociologist Shmuel Eisenstadt in his work "Revolution and transformation of societies. Comparative study of civilizations" notes that one of the leading factors underlying the formation of modern Western civilization is protest movements and revolutions. It is they who bring the ideas of social change and move Western society forward. Without them, the transition from traditional to modern civilization, and any modernization process in general, would be impossible. Eisenstadt writes that Western Europe as a civilization of the modern type is characterized by "the spirit of rivalry and competition, the desire to reduce the principle of hierarchy in favor of the principle of equality" (*Eisenstadt, 1978: 61*). That is, the goal of revolutions from western point of view is ultimately the achievement of a society of equal opportunities. Changes in European civilization always took place in the conditions of political struggle. So, for example, the history of Europe was characterized by tense relations between the state and society: "Two main forces - political elites and the state, on the one hand, and society - on the other hand, constantly fought for their rights, their participation in the formation of political and cultural centers and for the regulation of access to them, as well as for the transcendental principles of their justification. As a result, the social protest, which in some places turned into a revolution, was connected with the problems of access to the power centers" (*Eisenstadt, 1978: 63*). The main theme of protest political demands and revolutions, according to Eisenstadt, was "the search for the principles of social order". These principles were declared to be "equality, distributive justice, common public interests, the possibility of full expression of a person's creative potential, one's personal dignity, overcoming alienation" (*Eisenstadt, 1978: 64*). Protest movements were formed in Europe in two directions - nationalist and class. In European intellectual thought these protest movements were interpreted as the genesis of basic social contradictions. Eisenstadt emphasizes that it was Western society that "gave birth to the idea of a 'true' or 'pure' revolution, the main features of which are violence, a radical break with the past and totality of change" (*Eisenstadt, 1978: 69-70*).

So, according to S. Eisenstadt, the Western idea of creating a society of equal opportunities and overcoming inequality as injustice involves an active struggle, armed protest against various forms of inequality, which sometimes results in violence, rebellion and revolution. Now, if we look at the philosophical and theoretical basis of this understanding of overcoming inequality (in a violent way), then we should briefly look at the positions of three key European thinkers: J. Locke, K. Marx, A. Camus.

Early Enlightenment theorist J. Locke, whose theory of natural rights, we already had mentioned, noted that citizens have the right to revolt against an unjust tyrannical government that violates their natural rights and systema-

tically oppresses them. The people are the judge who decides whether the government is (un)just, whether it really represents the interests of the people who delegated such a right to it, and whether the people can renounce their duties towards the current government: "Who will be the judge and decide whether does the sovereign or the legislative body act contrary to the trust given to them?... To this I will answer: the people will be the judge! ... The people, who are constantly mistreated and whose rights are violated, will be ready ... to free themselves from a heavy burden that lies upon them" (Locke, 1988). If the people are unhappy, then no sacred royal status will justify the power: armed rebellion will be inevitable. According to the philosopher, the popular uprising against injustice does not lead to anarchy, but on the contrary to the "restoration of law and justice" (Locke, 1988).

In the 19th century the philosophical justification of the revolution as a way to resolve class contradictions and create a just, classless society of equality was given by K. Marx, who wrote that "philosophers only explained the world in different ways, but the point is to change it" (Marx, 1968). In history, according to Marx, there is always inequality, exploitation and alienation in social relations between people. Every socio-economic formation is characterized by continuous antagonism between the ruling class and the subordinate one. This antagonism inevitably leads to a revolutionary restructuring of society, as a result of which a new, more progressive formation takes place, and another class achieves the power. "Revolutions are the locomotives of history" (Marx, 1968). Revolutions can be of different types, but all of them are designed to resolve antagonistic contradictions in society, generated by inequality. So, for example, bourgeois and socialist revolutions aim to establish equality within society, national liberation revolutions lead to the establishment of equality at the macro-social level (equality between peoples, states, civilizations), and so on. Marx romanticized and popularized the idea of revolution, inspiring socialist political movements for equality and justice.

At the end of the 19th, the beginning of 20th century, philosophers and writers of the existentialism (Nietzsche, Dostoevsky, Camus, Remarque) show that the struggle against inequality as injustice is not only socio-political (as in Marx analysis), but moral-existential. The fact that a person is ready to fight and die for improvement of social conditions actually shows that one feels an inner connection of equality and self-worth (moral dignity). In a struggle a person thereby affirms one's own value, demonstrates an inner existential desire for justice. Through rebellion against injustice and inequality, a human being acquires the meaning of its own existence. Albert Camus linked the roots of rebellion with the human desire to find meaning in an absurdity. It is the rebel that brings meaning into a world in which there is no God and no predetermined essence, and where man is face to face with his own mortality (Camus, 2018). Freedom, creativity, justice, honour and other human values are born in rebellion. According to Camus, a revolting person, realizing his own freedom, responsibility and finitude of existence, thereby affirm his own individuality and solidarity with other persons: "I rebel, therefore we exist".

Thus, in the 18-19 centuries J. Locke and K. Marx focused attention on the socio-political aspects of the uprising and revolution as a means of overcoming existing inequality and injustice in society. In the 20th century A. Camus brought this problem to the moral and existential level, showing that rebellion is a choice for all those who do not

accept the path of impersonal conformity and non-authentic mode of existence.

The Faustian character of civilization as the basis of Western egalitarianism

Why did revolutions and protests as a response to the challenges of social inequality become integral features and factors in the formation of Western society? From our point of view, this feature is rooted in the worldview foundations of Western civilization. Let's recall that Martin Heidegger characterized nihilism as the "fate of the West", and Oswald Spengler in "The decline of the West" called the Western civilization "Faustian" (Spengler, 1991). The dominant personality in Western civilization is the Faustian type - the archetypal image of an individualist, a brave rebel hero and experimenter, a magician and a scientist who seeks knowledge that would give him omnipotence and power over this world. In his desire, a person of the Faustian type is ready to transgress existing social norms and moral restrictions, and even set a "contract with the devil" (the plot that later inspired J. Goethe's poem "Faust"). According to Spengler, the key characteristics of the Faustian (European) type of soul are the "will to break through into the infinite" (which includes the desire for continuous self-improvement, self-overcoming and the achievement of the "immortality of the Self") and "eternal knowledge as the will to power" (the desire to dominate and control). Faustian culture is a "culture of will", "a being those acts, fights, and overcomes", "a being in which the Self rules the world" (Spengler, 1991: 490-492).

Thus, the fact that revolutions and protests are an important factor in the formation of European civilization generally reflects the outlook of the West, the Faustian nature of Western civilization. The reflection of this Faustian (nihilistic) spirit was carried out by Western philosophers, who in their works justified and actually legalized revolution and rebellion as a means of fighting for justice. We can even say that the revolutions in the history of Europe directly or indirectly embodied philosophical ideas. So, for example, echoes of Enlightenment philosophy can be traced in the events of the Great French Revolution and its fight for liberty and equality; socialistic revolutions of the 20th century rooted back in the ideas of utopian socialists and K. Marx; the ideas of Freudism/Marxism inspired the so-called "sexual revolution" of the 1960s and radical feminism with its appeal to gender equality; the ideas of left-wing radical liberalism have influence the modern nihilistic practices of "cancel culture", etc.

Conclusion

In summary, we can say that the Western egalitarian tradition, in general, solves the problem of inequality through active struggle, rebellion, and revolution. Moreover, this struggle is twofold: on the one hand, there is a struggle against inequality as injustice, and on the other hand, there is a struggle for equality as an affirmation of personal dignity and the meaning of existence. (Here we can draw a parallel with the conception of E. Fromm, who singled out the negative "freedom from" and the positive "freedom for").

It is at this point, in relation to the idea of equality, lies one of the most fundamental differences between Western European culture (and the broader Western worldview) and non-European, non-Western cultures. Social equality as a value characterizes the individualistic ("atomistic") Western society of the modern type. In the future, it will be fruitful to continue our research in the direction of comparing the Western modern and postmodern society, which is

based on the idea of equality as justice, with the collectivist hierarchical society of the traditional type, which is oriented towards inequality. At the same time, we assume, based on comparative studies, that Eastern culture is more traditional than Western culture. (Hofstede, 2001). We also suggest that other non-Western societies (for instance, the civilization of India) have a different non-antagonistic, mystical-contemplative way of resolving contradictions generated by social inequality. But this is the topic of our next study.

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Нерівність як виклик у західній культурно-цивілізаційній парадигмі

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У статті основна увага приділяється проблемі соціальної нерівності у західній культурно-цивілізаційній парадигмі. Зазначається, що в історії західної філософії та культури завжди існувало два різних підходи до розуміння нерівності. Перший шлях елітаризму передбачав апологію нерівності, пропонуючи ідеї панування аристократії (нерівність всередині окремого суспільства) або ідеї расового панування (нерівність між народами і цивілізаціями). Цю традицію філософування можна умовно назвати традиційно-авторитарною (Платон, Аристотель), або романтично-консервативною (Х. Чемберлен). Другий шлях – егалітарний, який наполягає на створенні суспільства, побудованого на ідеї рівності (філософія лібералізму та марксизму). Якщо представники ліберального крила егалітаризму (Локк, Бен-там) зосереджені на обґрунтуванні суспільства рівних можливостей з наголосом на природних правах людини, то традиція марксизму тяжіє до розгляду суспільних протиріч, викликаних нерівністю, як антагоністичних. Відтак, специфічно західним шляхом викорінення нерівності стають протест, революція, бунт (Маркс, Камю). Водночас у статті зазначається, що глибинною світоглядною основою такого способу вирішення проблеми нерівності є нігілістичний характер західної цивілізації, її «фаустівський дух» (О. Шпенглер).

Ключові слова: нерівність, боротьба за рівність, егалітаризм, антагоністичні протиріччя, революція, екзистенціальний бунт, нігілізм, «фаустівський тип».

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