

ANDREI FLORESCU

WHY CONSERVATIVE VALUES INHERITED FROM PREVIOUS
GENERATIONS WILL CONTINUE TO SHAPE
CONTEMPORARY IDENTITY?

Andrei Florescu

University of Bucharest, Faculty of Philosophy, Bucharest, Romania.

Email: andreib.florescu@yahoo.com

Abstract: The aim of this paper is to investigate the continuing relevance of tradition in the lives of modern individuals. Although there is a visible pressure felt by the new generations to dissociate from the cultural heritage of their ancestors, I will try to point out the connecting elements that encourage generations to stay together in the process of achieving great goals that transcend their limited existence. First, I will argue that individuals may have posthumous interests that could go beyond the general insight and preserving tradition is a necessary precondition to underline the need to understand these unwritten requirements. I will continue to articulate in a new section the intergenerational outlook of some conservative thinkers, such as Burke and Oakeshott, regarding the enduring nature of social contract and I will finally suggest that tradition still possesses something valuable for today's people by taking further current interests, while keeping them close to the values of their parents and ancestors.

Key words: tradition, future generations, conservative values, identity, development, changes, heritage, practices, rules, experience.

1. Self-identity through time and posthumous harm

In order to reach a deeper level of comprehension about self-development process I suggest that it is necessary to reconsider first the primary role of conservative values in shaping contemporary identity. In his tireless yearning for affirmation and universal recognition common individual is often tempted to bypass the hidden meaning of organic order inherited from ancestors, hoping in this way to replace long-lasting social rules with spectacular innovations, even revolutionary ones, but proceeding accordingly he actually diminishes the chances of its success. From my standpoint, if we move ahead to a general framework, this kind of mistake which lies in a misunderstanding of past achievements can lead to unexpected risks also in the case of contemporaries and future generations who will seek, for the sake of novelty, to improve themselves only on the basis of an antithesis to their parents and grandparents customs. Far from solving a puzzling problem, abandoning conservative values does not help people to define themselves better, quite the contrary, it reduces the probability of intergenerational spiritual connections which otherwise would have facilitated the fulfillment of this claim.

Listening to the mentality of some individuals, personal identity does not seem to end simply with the physical disappearance, because due to personal beliefs in correspondence with social practices many of the contemporaries have a variety of expectations and fears that transcend mundane existence. Expectations belonging in this category are not just about how the bodies will be handled after death, but those involve much more complexities than some would be inclined to foresee, usually being related to the way their posthumous image must be perceived, including strong imperatives regarding testamentary will, carrying on certain projects or defending person's reputation (Feinberg 1974). So to speak, personal development it is an ongoing process that goes beyond the person's death if we sit and look at this issue with pure objectivity. In reply to Feinberg, Ernest Partridge (Partridge 1981), does not consider that the dead might have interests, nor that they could suffer from actions taking place after their disappearance, accepting in his research paper only a narrow definition of the concept of personal harm and insisting that current inexistence can no longer generate distress. Behind an ontological outlook like the one featured by Partridge seems to work a reductionist principle: since the person is missing, we also lose the subject to which our judgment is assigned, argument also praised by Waluchow (1986). I would say that, obviously, if we think only in terms of hedonistic pleasure, his statement becomes indisputably true; on the other hand, as I indicated above, personal identity requires prolonged time to be revealed

and understood by others, thus, even if the individual has died, his memory still needs some sort of public defense, if not continuous recognition.

A suitable case qualified to support this hypothesis is discussed by O'Neill, who depicts a situation where posthumous justice is needed in order to repair a previous act of negligence or malevolence. In compliance with his words, assuming that a recent study reveals that discoveries made by a famous mathematician who died during this time were stolen and illegitimately claimed by another author, although present people did not know him, they still have a duty to restore the historical truth and repair his posthumous image as soon as possible (O'Neill 1993, 38-39). In the name of solidarity that transcends the ages and generations, personal identity must be continuously respected even if the values in which we currently believe underwent some changes. Reaching this provisional conclusion, we can say that without a shared tradition to perpetuate, the desire of contemporaries to solve past injustices may remain a secluded target, strictly limited by other priorities and options, simply because they no longer identify with the sufferings of the previous generations. It should be noted that this argument of an endless need for restorative justice towards human being still remains valid even if we promote the thesis that past generations no longer feel a direct benefit (or satisfaction) from preserving traditional values respectively, as was the case discussed before, to receive apologies and public recognition. The purpose of maintaining and transmitting a set of moral practices, such as the constant struggle for defending human dignity as an immutable feature of society, could still have an irreplaceable impact in helping descendants to trace their common roots and return their hope that future generations deserve beforehand the sacrifices that are now being made.

Philosophical inquiry, as I understand it, rely on the edge of a subtle distinction between hurting precisely the person in question (for example, as an injury suffered while being alive) respectively damaging person's posthumous image or reputation (when circumstances of causing harm as a form to perpetrate revenge still remain a feasible thing). Some scholars (Mulgan 1999; Brecher 2002; Wisniewski 2009) advocate at least in favor of a mild duty to acknowledge a certain moral status to those people who lived before us beginning from the assumption that our forefathers have displayed a responsible concern not just about their personal interests, but also for the needs of future generations. We know that our existence has been taken into account before we were born because today's living conditions have been greatly improved not only through reckless investment, but also through savings and precaution. The avoidance of wrong choices with long-term consequences can be interpreted as a gesture of solidarity towards the following generation, which could possibly mean that identification with their personality was already so close that some healthy sacrifices justified the restraints on behalf of

medium-term goals. Therefore, it is right to discuss personal development only in existential terms or we should consider the whole social environment that survives after the person's death as a factor exerting a great influence over descendants perceptions?

As Avner de-Shalit explains, the feeling of belonging to a sustainable collectivity (or a “transgenerational community”, as suggestively described it throughout his book) that shares common values from one generation to another gives citizens the empowerment to project themselves far away in a spiritual field of experience where remaining lifetime achievements create a connection bridge between predecessors and descendants (de-Shalit 1995). Together with the idealistic hope for a common endeavor comes the necessary motivation to consider the well-being of the remote future beings which unites kindred spirits through feelings of empathy and devotion. In theory at least, reflecting on your past and trying to understand conservative values which underpinned today's institutions becomes an important and quasi-natural stage of personal development strengthened by spiritual bonds. Of course, Avner de-Shalit disapproves any illegitimate attempt to equate or forcefully impose intergenerational preferences without taking into account social divisions or contextual changes. However, setting aside common sense warnings that are always welcomed, the author moves back to the incremental nature of communities, noticing that, whether they are raised in the Christian, Islamic or Judaic faith, children usually tend to maintain to a large extent many of their parents' beliefs, gradually assimilating rather than abandoning them. More specifically, a reliable proof that conservative values fulfill a continuous task throughout personal development process stems from the fact that we can barely identify huge differences between how we, as humans, used to relate to the same events in the past and nowadays, neither if we refer to religious practices, nor to symbolic ceremonies such as marriage or funeral (de-Shalit 1995, 20). On the same topic regarding traditional values, but on a wider scale, Antoon De Baets (2004, 137) proceeds to take the analogy even further in observing a few outstanding resemblances between modern rituals and those practiced by Neanderthals, like the mutual concern for arranging settlements such as today's graves, maintained by a common demand to respect the concept of posthumous dignity.

Consequently, we can say that after the loss of a meaningful tradition not just past interests are hurt by oblivion, figuratively speaking, because at the same time their fading brings concrete consequences on how contemporary identity is passed down to the next generation. I guess the descendants will not be too content with the weight of recent achievements if they were built on rejecting the distant past, because it basically forces them to relate even more to the humble preferences of the previous generation. Tearing individuals apart from our common heritage that provide a trustworthy experience the total amount of freedom is

unfortunately confined by an increasing interdependence between two successive generations. Thus, we are sinking into a paradox: who is the real beneficiary of rejecting conservative values considering that without them neither the ancestors, nor the future generations are better represented in absence, so precisely at the times when they are most vulnerable and cannot defend themselves? Maybe the last chance of a satisfactory answer is that it will work for the sake of contemporaries, but as any trace of tradition gradually disappears, I tend to believe that personal development will become an even more conflicting process because of the selfishness that individualism promotes.

2. Preserving tradition and experience as tools to express our identity

The question that arises next is whether conservative values really support present individuals in shaping their identity and preferences or restrict their degree of freedom by prescribing obsolete rules dictated by the will of past generations. This kind of habitual predetermination that progressives often blame to further their agenda it is indeed an integral part of the individual's personality, but if we don't want to present it in a biased manner we must accept the premise that it is not the rational product of a single mind which compels us to act upon a pattern, but rather an impersonal engine of stability ensuring social equilibrium. According to Edward Shils, tradition (understood here merely as a bundle of beliefs) implies not only keeping institutions untouched by the required changes, but also carefully measure out when is the right time to initiate reforms so they retain original character for which were initially founded. The unbearable truth that Shils challenges us to recognize is that human imagination is finite and it would be a costly ignorance not to admit by default these limitations. (Shils 1981, 195-212). Assuming it would be possible, even holding such a great power would not lead things to a positive direction and we already know this from the centralized experience of the Soviet Union, for instance. It was as a serious mistake in not recognizing the significance of the past and its values for those who believed that they could reach their goals using only the knowledge gathered by present generation (Shils 1981, 199).

Encapsulating the individual in a predictable environment and assisting him step by step to find a meaning in life, tradition provides only a safe space for man to adapt his needs to an inherited social framework, but does not try to modify his inner nature. On the other hand, no one says that tradition is infallible, but unlike progress that promises to solve all the inconvenient problems at least does not deceive people into believing that perfection can be achieved. The unpleasant part of the matter is that, in order to receive the guarantees that you will be able to

differentiate from the herd, this radical ideology of quick progress preaches that you have to break away from tradition and his nurturing influence. As far as I'm concerned, such a preconception is obviously harmful because it places tradition and progress in a conflictual relationship, which in no case serves sustainable development or personal interests to flourish.

In one of his famous essays entitled "*Rationalism in Politics*", Michael Oakeshott offers to disentangle the complicated connection between two kinds of human knowledge, namely "*technical knowledge*" and "*practical knowledge*" (Oakeshott 1995, 8-45). The definitions provided by the philosopher indicate us that, far from being a real conflict between tradition and theoretical understanding, these two types of knowledge can stand as complementary work in guiding the individual towards advancement. Firstly, through "*technical knowledge*" Oakeshott describes the sets of universal rules that can be formulated in a handbook and then reproduced exactly in the same form, being mainly characterized by precision. They can contribute to personal development strengthening the common ground of theoretical understanding through which people can primary learn how to perform various actions and examine an accessible methodology, but still apart from experience. He further exemplifies that to this category belong learning processes among which can be listed memorizing the Highway Code or culinary recipes. Once these actions are initiated, they only can be improved by moving through constant exercise to the subsequent level of knowledge. Therefore, here comes the turn of "*practical knowledge*" to complete, over repeated attempts and failures, the long way that leads to the training of professional skills. In Oakeshott's vision, it is essential to keep in mind that experience gives value to theoretical knowledge, and also that scientific discoveries could never have been useful in themselves if each time the search for progress began from scratch (Oakeshott 1995, 14-16).

It is obvious then, in a concrete state of affairs when you expect to become a professional cook or driver, that the experience you accumulate makes all the difference between success and failure. By comparison, the mechanical pursuit of improvised rules prescribed by your own conscience would have no practical significance in real life circumstances if the accumulated wisdom of ancestors wouldn't be on your side as a model of human conduct. Thus, a disciple of conservative thinking will not be inhibited or discouraged by mundane imperfection to proceed through constant labor towards gradual amelioration, as progressive critics tend to demonize the constructive potential of reform by demanding radical (often destructive) solutions in order to make space through these changes for theoretical planning. Because he does not fantasize about a society entirely cured by vices, the one who gracefully embraces tradition, satisfied enough with what he inherited, will find a reasonable path to separate the things that cause him trouble and to continue with beneficial

projects without inflicting damage or unnecessary risks on others. Needless to say that, at least in my opinion, from collective interests outlook appears to be more unfruitful to blame tradition for your personal weaknesses, attempting to undermine its general authority, rather than simply accept its immanence as something helpful and undisturbing that some of your fellows still need in their lives to be fulfilled.

The strategy to focus our attention on more plausible things that lie within our power of understanding, but especially taking with us past experiences transmitted from ancestors, seems to be the conservative creed that promotes, both in everyday life and in political practice, the most promising method of adjustment. As Rayner interprets Oakeshott's thinking in opposition to the bold efforts of liberalism, conservative values possess the direct advantage that a reasonable amount of skepticism derived from practice withholds the spread of unrealistic expectations. Thanks to the long history of previous experiments that we owe to past generations, but also to the cautious reluctance of contemporaries not to involve theory in political practice, Oakeshott thought that the threat of ideologies and rationalist tendencies that have nothing in common with reality can disappear once the activities undertaken by individuals will concentrate on less idealistic goals (Rayner, 1995).

It appears that, if we look in retrospect at the euphoric events that took place in the political sphere, we would probably be surprised to find out that many of them ended up being huge disappointments precisely because right from the beginning they move far away from the actual circumstances in which ordinary people lived. Although in the history there might be several noticeable exceptions of successful revolutionary approaches, when the enthusiasm to break the rules of tradition ended up creating a salutary change, this fact wasn't necessarily due to the individual inventiveness that would have found more suitable solutions to ancient problems, but to a collective and well organized desire to change the social paradigm. However, even in those cases, a rise in popular demand for institutional readjustments may not symbolize the willingness for a detachment from experience or adherence to an idealistic project, but rather a spontaneous burst of shared experiences repressed for a while by certain customs, asking now for a different tradition to identify with. Something like this proves to me why empty promises that populist politicians make (and which are naturally followed by utopian expectations), are more dangerous for *personal development* than a quiet philosophy of "*limited politics*", as researchers of conservative thinking like Rayner coined it, whose steady objective is to respect traditional wisdom by securing a comfortable place for each individual within the organic order.

On the same topic of the continuous relevance of tradition over personal identity, Samuel Scheffler offers in his particular light strong reasons for the need to preserve long-standing rules by analyzing their

present normative force. He believes that imitating past behaviours would not produce by itself enough satisfaction for individuals not to abandon easily a certain tradition, so he deduces from here that has to be something more in the middle and the values espoused by intergenerational wisdom could be those that attract credibility to act further in a predictable manner. Likewise, a sense of familiarity that they belong to a cultural universe stretched beyond their own contemporary world persuade the citizens of a community to seek answers in the past as a complementary solution, even if it remains a provisionally one, for their need to receive broadly acknowledgements. Scheffler also insists that the endurance of traditional values gives individuals plenty of freedom to manifest their personality because pre-existing rules suggest how should be perform a certain task, but leaves at their subjective will when it is the proper time to behave accordingly, respectively when they should go against that rule (Scheffler 2010, 287-311).

For instance, in the quoted chapter a specific scenario imagined by Scheffler where the enchantment created by respecting tradition replaces the frivolous pleasure of testing new things contains an ordinary situation of a person who chooses to drink his coffee every day in the same place. The author's assumption is that in cases like this many unpredictable variables discourage the individual to choose other options, especially since he already finds a lot of joy in the routine developed by repeating certain pleasant activities, the real secret being that as his experiences related to that location increase, the disposition that familiarity brings will make him even less willing to abandon this suitable part of his life with which he identifies so well. In a completely unfair way, he believes, we usually underestimate the positive impact of "the usual" in our lives, forgetting how valuable are the experiences which are meant to remind us that our existence is not confined to a single moment currently lived and suddenly disappearing, but represents a succession of events, more or less remarkable by themselves, so significant for the lasting image of the individual if taken together (Scheffler 2010, 287-311).

A similar interpretation about the temporal persistence of past events is also articulated in a distinct chapter wrote by Seana Shifferin, who appreciates that individuals still attach some timeless value to ordinary things or former practices because they live forever in memory and remind them of pleasant moments, although they are not anymore sustainable or materially profitable to be reiterated very often. An example of this kind, Shifferin says, can be represented by a typical understanding of a musical composition that the individual values, without the necessary need to exhibit his feelings of gratitude through continuous listening of the same melody. Traditional practices belong to the same category in that they must be valued further because, generally speaking, they have a continuous positive meaning and remind us of a past to which we remain grateful and spiritually close to, even if in the

meantime the current rules that define us as contemporaries, usually cultivated in response to the problems of the present century, are going in a slightly different direction (Shifferin 2013, 143-158).

Therefore, we must still be aware of the positive value of previous experiences over personal development, even though the disappearance of valuable practices and the biased emphasis on the generational gap make our ideals seem distant from those of our ancestors, when they are, in general terms, almost mutually embraced. My intuition tells me that the primordial dangers that may arise as a result of rejecting tradition, and which I try to emphasize here, refer specifically to the possible loss of some irreplaceable pieces of our own collective identity that continues to exist in a damaged shape even after abandoning the prescribed rules that we inherited. Whether the progressive individuals of the XXIst century want to recognize it or not, like no other exception before I'd dare to say, they are currently experiencing the consequences of wrongs committed by their predecessors, but also their past sacrifices, and somehow paradoxically all of them taken together created the context in which we strive today to assert our individuality.

Honestly said, it seems to be a perennial thing, drawn from the experience of past centuries, that we will always find some contemporaries blaming their ancestors for the unfinished works they have inherited, just as the original vision of those who started the projects criticized today was not likely to bring them to perfection overnight. As Stove points out, the illusion of perfection about which conservative thinking has issued a warning deceives individuals to put away the constructive efforts of their ancestors even before discovering that the remaining alternatives are less desirable (Stove 2003, 174).

Taking into account the fact that most of them required not only enormous accuracy to withstand, but also a wide temporal range for testing and repairing errors made by human design, it is reasonable to assume that in their wretched innocence our ancestors hoped that great transformative achievements, like long-running social institutions, will not be taken for granted, but rather will be appreciated and largely improved by future generations. So when it comes to centralized efforts made to forget the traditions that have contributed to what we are long before we were born, as a rationalist alternative instead of simply reforming them to extract the benefits of the experience, they also become destructive to personal development, because by challenging the solid foundation of the social order in which we are destined to act somehow in a predictable way, we do nothing else but to deny our own nature. This brings us to the following self explanatory question: are our community interactions and personal relationships sufficiently welded over time to perceive the hypothetical social contract between individuals from the perspective of uninterrupted succession between generations?

3. Intergenerational social contract and the birth of a collective identity

Despite the fact that there is not enough space here to formulate exhaustive answers or to draw any final conclusions on the matter addressed before, I find it useful, however, to give a few hints just to indicate several possible directions of research in the future. I have mentioned in the first place that for a broad understanding of the process behind personal development it is necessary to go back into the past in order to capture at every stage of growth how traditional norms evolved and how the behavior of ordinary citizens has been marked, either by their continuity or by their substitution. Whatever the chosen path, inevitably the collective identity that was formed (and further transformed) influenced through its organic ramifications the patterns of action adopted in society by the renewed individuals. Then what is the point to try in vain and with higher costs fueled by uncertainty to express our scattered identity through revolutionary attitudes that despise tradition and divide us, when we can very easily reassert through it our spiritual ties with past and future generations, recognizing each other the same duties that we usually assign to contemporaries by virtue of the presumptive desire to enjoy the same rights. In other words, the foundations of intergenerational cooperation may already have been cultivated through the evolution of conservative values, and the newborn individuals of each generation who have preserved the common axiological heritage of their ancestors indirectly consented to an interpretation of the social contract from the extended intergenerational approach, involving not only continuous reciprocity, but a display of concrete gestures reflecting political solidarity even towards those who will live after us and we don't know anything specific yet about the trajectory of their personal development.

A rich and growing philosophical literature that explores the socio-political nature of the individual is available nowadays, some of the works strongly emphasizing the need to keep alive cooperation with others in order to make it easier and safer to achieve personal or collective goals, even in cases where from a clear position of superiority it does not seem very convenient to respond with reciprocity (Mannheim 1952; Wade-Benzoni 2002; Axelrod 2006). We can add here a whole tradition of ideas that initially developed in adherence to Aristotelian thought in trying to define man as “*zoon politikon*” (Aristotle 1998, 76). However, in a delicate context a great progress has been made with the publishing of Edmund Burke's work, called “*Reflections on the Revolution in France*”, due to his conservative plea for enframing of a collective identity through the succession of generations, recognizing, alongside with the social nature of the individual, an intrinsic human need to maintain organic continuity in order to protect its membership to the community that has raised him

with huge generosity and a lot of sacrifices. Also, the primary concern of the visionary thinker was not to be so restricted as to describe the fundamental purpose of institutions only in terms of satisfying short-term interests expressed by contemporary whims, but he entrusted them with the obligation to preserve for future generations sustainable values gathered under the dome of tradition (Burke 2000).

First, Burke is opposing to the idealistic philosophers like Rousseau (Rousseau 2002), that treat the social contract only as an unsatisfactory compensation, comprised of a gross comparison with the perfect conditions supposedly provided in a state of nature, together with the benefits conferred in those times to individuals stripped of citizenship. On the other hand, the philosopher goes beyond the basic contractual agreements (Locke 1988; Hobbes 1996) usually proposed in democratic societies to reconcile separate interests of a commercial type literally by delegating authority to an elected governmental power which should express the common will of current individuals. What Burke explicitly proposes instead, as can be seen from the controversy with Thomas Paine involving “the rights of man” and his place in society (Paine, 1998; Ball 2000; Levin 2014), is to understand the moral substance of community as a continuous reality and to interpret the social contract, if it really exists after all in a purely conscious form, as an intergenerational partnership confirmed and renewed not as a result of each person's consent, but rather as an innate consequence derived from the experience of each generation. He states, in other words, that personal development, which is a transient thing, is subordinated to other noble goals, created also by community members through association, but which serves the enduring interests held by each individual who has lived or will ever live in that specific society (Burke 2000, 140).

Last, but not least, to underline the continuous relevance of tradition over the identity of people, Burke brings into discussion an eloquent example throughout his times by pointing out how important it is for the idea of liberty that Church should keep its properties apart from the realm of political decision-making (or separate from any centralized power in general) precisely to prevent the invasion of less grounded influences, such as inappropriate pressures dictating how the reform should be done coming at the suggestion of other institutions, because the disputed issues belong to another layer of society that has developed organically by following the unwritten rules of an intergenerational social contract and which can only be fully understood in correlation with its historical and spiritual roots. His logic is obviously based on intuition and common sense: if until then faithful people who perceived the beneficial effects of spirituality on their personal development took care that the Church has its own sources of funding, what is the point in authorizing to take over this attribution the ambiguous voice of the revolutionaries who contest the long-standing social order and suddenly claim to represent the State?

Burke's charges consists, therefore, in unrealistic expectations spread by the revolutionaries who demand forced changes and destabilize the organic order, while presenting themselves as the unconditional supporters of social progress. In his opinion, it must be prevented this kind of radical interference within the social contract that aims to challenge the meaning of tradition through an unprecedented erasure of the spiritual inheritance left by ancestors with the purpose to serve the common development of future generations that will be guided by the same conservative values (Burke 2000, 145-148).

Then, his main argument can be ready for readjustment to the current conditions of the XXIst century and interpreted as follows: since ancient times religion has always offered a valuable consolation even to those of us who did not have the material resources of the wealthiest, nor the vanity of the individualists, to assert our personality through exhibitionist gestures, leaving instead available, through conventional mechanisms that are already working, the promise that before God we can all achieve equality in the end. From my standpoint, personal development continuously depends on the insurance provided by a reliable intergenerational social contract that aims to protect tradition as a tool of counteraction, because the passage of time and the process of rapid modernization exacerbate in fact the need to become more conservative as a foreseeable consequence to the loss endured by our collective memory. Therefore, in terms of asserting the identity of a newborn generation, the preliminary findings of my research support the same hypothesis that there is no certain proof that such a contract would become less relevant in relation to today's needs and preferences.

4. Family influences on personal habits and beliefs

Taking the analysis one step further, for complete objectivity I will assume that tradition alone was not convincing enough to determine each individual to preserve traditional values as a way of expressing gratitude towards the collective memory of native community. However, these long-standing values have influenced parents' actions and also, together with them, they defined the suitable approach that was implemented to grow and educate us. So, whether we will choose later to move away from ordinary practices, we must honestly admit that conservative values are the first that shaped our behavior, giving us the chance and hope to develop in a pleasant and receptive environment by pursuing freely our interests.

There is a lot of empirical evidence proving that children often mirror their parents' behavior, even if they are intentionally seeking it, or try to differentiate themselves by constantly keeping them in mind as a reference (Westholm, 1999). For many scholars, the parental support

received by children until they reach maturity seems to be a strong argument not only to motivate younger generations in helping their frail parents later in life through enhancement of intergenerational solidarity, but also to gradually embrace a part of their conservative values and habits (Hillcoat-Nallétamby and Dharmalingam 2006; Szydlik 2012). The feeling of responsibility is therefore part of the identity of individuals, not just a disposable burden, and it seems that some are not completely fulfilled until they return the same amount of support to those who have taught them how to behave and adapt to the norms of society.

Unless substantial changes occur during the intergenerational transfer of values, bringing new opportunities to younger generations, the mentality of individuals who were hostile to traditional practices becomes more flexible over time as the encounter of common issues makes them more able to understand their parents' choices. In order to reach this moderate conclusion, which entails the belief that conservative values are still playing a beneficial role in the process of personal development, it is often necessary to spend some time waiting for young people to become themselves breadwinners and be obliged to take care of the future for their children. However, conservative values are indeed periodically tested by lifestyle differences that create an intergenerational gap between parents and children and among the primary causes of these misunderstandings we find: decreased fertility, a very high divorce rate or the new social trends that define the main interests of young people, which indicates an unexpected shift from the traditional concern of having a family towards a more individualistic one that involves a closer focus on career improvement and professional development (Bordone 2012).

Yet, is there a possibility that these intergenerational misunderstandings can be overcome by a minimum consensus and the conservative teachings finally accepted for the valuable standards of experience they possess? According to an extensive study conducted over three consecutive generations of mothers belonging to the same families it was observed that the desire for change of each young generation usually alternates with the aspiration of continuity. In this way, although modernity has created new opportunities for development, many young girls have chosen to work in areas related with their mothers' former profession (Brannen, Moss and Mooney 2004). I also believe that, perceived in the light of its qualitative aspects, the contrast of the achievements obtained from one generation to another is obviously remarkable, because in the end social changes and family influences have been structurally modified, but the fact that must be appreciated is that there is no imminent conflict (as can be noted from the cases mentioned above) between protecting conservative values and the legitimate aspiration to be better prepared than our parents.

Even where things looked slightly different than in accordance with our personal will, and the strictness of tradition rather indicated that we should go on a predetermined path for our material safety, the experienced advice received from the parents always represented a second trustworthy opinion that marked the decisive moment in choosing whether the rules of tradition should be respected and continued or temporarily abandoned in that specific context. What I mean is that the practical function of tradition has a twofold meaning to communicate what is right and wrong for our development: on the one hand we have its normative character, which tells us what needs to be done, and on the other, a demonstrative one, which encapsulates the examples of good practices and previous errors. For example, quite often an old mistake committed in the family by our forefathers weighs heavily and could be valuable in itself to contemporaries because the process of remembering it shows us that the appropriate solution could be achieved by an opposite action. Moreover, because this cautious fact is widely known thanks to conventional wisdom and the previous errors made by ancestors, it turns out that the duty of preserving conservative values represents at the same time a personal challenge to improve ourselves, because tradition constitutes a part of our common identity and it can still be a useful tool for the development of new generations.

5. Concluding remarks

As I stated before, it was not my intention in the current discussion to offer definitive answers on the chosen topic, but just to formulate a series of possible explanations that I considered necessary to advance new philosophical hypotheses in the future. My narrow goal was rather to emphasize the importance of tradition on human nature and to argue that individuals have interests that transcend their existence. In my opinion, this assumption is well founded and the evidence lies in the sacrifices made in the past in order for the present generations to benefit from prosperity and the social institutions run by long-standing values. It is quite clear from this angle that those who have enriched tradition through their personal experiences, later transmitted to be inherited by their successors, had as a model the coherent image of sustainable development, not just their short-term interests. Seems plausible then at least to believe that past generations had some expectations regarding our future behavior and would probably have been disappointed if they found out that we had abandoned for no reason the practices they had tried to keep alive with huge efforts.

Likewise, if the identity of future people would be known in advance, together with the certainty of the axiological differences that divide generations, there is a considerable amount of risk that

predecessors will become selfish and abandon essential projects that do not bring them exclusive benefits. In order to remove this serious threat I have tried to prove that to some extent tradition already embodies the interests of all individuals (whether they belong to past, present or future generations) and a wise choice in the path of personal development is precisely to maintain as long as possible the practices verified through the collective experience. In addition, I considered very helpful for individuals to listen the practical advice received from the family as a second method of validating the authority of tested practices recommended by the community. Concluding, we can maintain that conservative values will continue to shape the identity of contemporaries, but in my view this is a positive aspect because society as a whole reflects the performance of an uninterrupted social contract due to the institutional continuity that serves the interests and needs of all generations.

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