

REVIEWS

SEMINARE

t. 43 * 2022, nr 4, s. 181-182

DOI: <http://doi.org/10.21852/sem.2022.4.13>

Ferenc Hörcher, *A Political Philosophy of Conservatism Prudence, Moderation and Tradition*, Great Britain 2020, pp. 210.

Conservatism as a political ideology, despite the fact that today it still finds its supporters, remains – especially considering the present state of Europe – on a margin connected with the market of political ideas. Unfortunately, most often it results from a misunderstanding or misunderstanding of the main ideas related to this current of philosophy, as well as a misunderstanding of the main political assumptions related to conservatism, be it evolutionary or traditional. A book by Ferenc Hörcher, who is a specialist in the philosophy of politics, comes out against this situation. He studied in Budapest, Oxford and Brussels-Leuven. He is professor of Philosophy at Pázmány Péter Catholic University and director of the Institute of Philosophy of the Hungarian Academy of Science. He regularly teaches at the Jagiellonian University (Kraków) and the Babes-Bolyai University in Cluj-Napoca (Kolozsvár). He researched in Göttingen, Wassenaar, Cambridge, Edinburgh and at Notre Dame University.

In his reflection on conservatism in political terms, the author focuses mainly on the part related to the world of values, which, in Hörcher's opinion, constitute the core of thinking about man, the world and all activities, including political activity. A virtue which he discusses in depth on this very aspect is prudence. The narrative presented in this way makes the book undoubtedly original, because there are few researchers today who refer to traditional values and are able to update them in the light of contemporary problems and dilemmas, of which there are many in the world of politics.

The book is essentially divided into two parts. The first part (pp. 13-78) is devoted to the historical development of prudence in both the world of philosophy and the world of politics. The author shows the light and dark sides of how this virtue was approached by philosophers and politicians. It is valuable that the author of the book devotes space to reflection on prudence in Aristotle's philosophy. However, he does it in an innovative way, because using the already available studies, he presents his own position on the matter and tries to give meaning to this virtue in the present day. The second part of the book (pp. 79-161) is deeply practical, although the narrative is built on the basis of the theoretical connections between the virtue of prudence in conservatism and the world of politics. It must be emphasized at this point that the author is not uncritical about the problem of prudence. This is due to the fact that, first of all, it shows some limitations related to the implementation of this virtue both in the life of a specific person and in the life of a specific community, pointing to three basic problems: agency, time and knowledge.

However, the author of the book presents the most interesting and original approach to the subject in the subsections of the second part, that is: *The prudent individual's resources: Virtues and character*, *The prudent community's resources: Tradition and political culture* and *How to find the proper action in politics*. On the one hand, Hörcher shows that the strength of the virtues on which conservatism is based results from the character of a specific person, on the other hand, it shows that conservatism cannot be built in solitude. The strength of a community is built by the strength of the character of people who want to remain in a given community. This is what the author writes in the part concerning prudence exercised by man in the framework of virtues and character (in reference to Aristotle [the classical concept of virtues] and Alasdair MacIntyre [contemporary interpretation of the concept of virtues]): „In what follows, we take a look at two major factors that provide resources to help individuals arrive at the right decisions in politics. What is more, these factors play a major role in determining the relationship between the individual and the different types of groups of which she or he is a member, and more generally, the way individual agents and their communities

relate to each other” (p. 117). It is also difficult to disagree – against the background of contemporary political and ideological disputes – with the following thesis put forward by the author of the book: „Prudence, or this-worldly wisdom, reminds humans that perfection is not available in this world. A conservative political philosophy of prudence needs to give up perfectionism” (p. 148).

When assessing the formal side of the book, it is difficult to accuse any flaw. The structure of the book under review is clear, logical and transparent. The presentation is conducted in an academic manner, but also understandable to a reader who does not know the history of conservatism in depth. The book can therefore be valuable for both the expert on the subject and the layman. In terms of content, the book meets all the features of science. The author refers both to classical authors related to conservatism and looks for new interpretations of the problem. It must be admitted that the author has dealt with a difficult topic, because prudence as a political virtue does not constitute much (contemporary) interest in the market of ethical or political ideas. One clear drawback of the book is that the author avoids confrontation with other contemporary philosophical currents such as liberalism, libertarianism, and postmodernism. The book lacks references and comparisons as well as searching for answers to the question of how conservatism and virtue ethics compare with the dominant trends mentioned above. Such a reference could help the reader understand the importance of conservatism in the contemporary “struggle for man” in the context of the world of values.

It should be emphasized, however, that the book is a valuable contribution to the development of a conservative philosophy of politics and should be another source of inspiration for researchers of the part of philosophy that deals with practical action, i.e. politics.

Michał Stachurski

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2877-3895> * michal.stachurski@poczta.onet.pl