

SEE THE DEVIL AND TAME HIM

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1. No one, not even the best experts in the domain of political science (including the top Kremlinologists), was able to foresee the early crash of the so-called socialist camp. The Polish free elections of June 4, 1989 took most, if not all, Poles by surprise. Nevertheless, any attentive and active observer of what happened in this country over the years knows well that the crash had been slowly drawing near. Since the universally known occurrences in March 1968 and the violent protests in December, 1970 of the Gdansk workers that ended in bloodshed and the ouster of Gomulka's clique, the Polish scene has changed in a conspicuous way.

First of all, the system became gradually and incessantly de-ideologized. That means that it was increasingly devoid of any masterminded historical perspective that could attract the intelligentsia and the youth. Secondly — and this was the direct effect of the much diminished world-view aspirations of the ruling elite —, the system generated a propaganda of blatant conformity with the *status quo* primarily for the sake of becoming rich (to the degree possible in the given conditions) or fostered careers for the price of subscribing to the ubiquitous slogans promoting red-badged patriotism. In the spheres of art, science, and philosophy this meant either sheer opportunism (especially as the cultural bureaucracy consisted of frustrated individuals deprived of talent, critical acumen and broad vistas who had rid themselves of "Jews, cosmopolitans, and spies") or an escape to endemic regions (e.g.,

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students' cultural enterprises or relatively uncontrolled associations of artists or scholars) in order to continue professional interests without the ever present pressure of official requirements or strict censorship, or finally the decision openly to adopt a dissident position in conflict with the de-ideologized but routinely and superficially practiced Marxist-Leninist ideology continually extolled as the only correct ideology. This third option gained in popularity at the end of the 70s after the Radom workers' demonstrations and the emergence of the Committee for the Defense of the Workers (KOR) which grouped together a significant number of outstanding intellectuals, i.e., scientists, writers, priests, etc. In the eighties, after the declaration of martial law, the dissident position superseded by far the other options; the most striking examples in this respect are the Actors' and Journalists' Unions whose members had been hitherto obedient and silent or servile to a considerable degree to the communist authorities who cunningly spared no expenses or awards to bribe and spoil them.

2. Irrespective of these options (which were the dominant ones among others that I will not dwell on here), Marxist-oriented attitudes and commitments in the humanities were pushed to a great extent to the peripheries. The official ideology was triumphant but toothless. The break in the years 1968–70 had the effect that, with one significant exception, viz., the work of the Poznań school where Jerzy Kmita brilliantly developed historical epistemology and Leszek Nowak interpreted Marx's dialectics of the abstract and the concrete in an original fashion, Marxism, despite official sponsoring, virtually died. The Marxist-oriented historians of philosophy continued their research with more or less success, but their publications no longer inspired discussions, commentaries, controversies. It is symptomatic that the major achievements of the two decades 1970–1990 belong to non-Marxist thinkers; Leszek Kołakowski, doubtless the best Polish philosopher, published during this period one of the most penetrating and devastating analyses of the main currents of Marxism to this day.

In my area of scholarly endeavor the situation was similar. Since the mid-fifties, i.e., after the Polish October, I happened to be the foremost exponent of the Marxist philosophy of art. All around me and my collaborators or disciples phenomenological thought blossomed under

the influence of Roman Ingarden. Władysław Tatarkiewicz wrote his excellent history of aesthetics up to the beginning of the 18th century as well as the systematic outline of six fundamental aesthetic concepts in their historical peregrinations from ancient Greece to our day. Maria Gołaszewska produced an instructive textbook on the seminal problems of aesthetics; Mieczysław Wallis deepened his semiotic approach to art, and Jan Białostocki and his circle drew on Panofsky's iconology and interpreted it in a novel manner.

What is particularly symptomatic is my own standpoint in those years and the results of my investigations. I carefully scrutinized the entire Marxist aesthetic heritage which had been taken for granted by Soviet writers and their followers. I raised such questions as whether, in this current, the nodal questions had been dealt with, whether the categories employed by Marxists were managed correctly, what in their labors will remain as only historically significant and what can be the basis of fruitful inquiries today, and finally what are the inherent limitations of this current and its method, in particular whether and how the Marxist aesthetic axiology could take its place in a dialogue among rivals in the search for contemporary solutions. In fact, I tried to remake the Marxist heritage, adjusting it to my purposes to solve the scholarly dilemmas I encountered in appropriating or rejecting 20th century philosophy of art up to and including the 60s. The key problems I struggled with are set forth in my two books published outside Poland a few years later, namely in my account — in Italian — of the history of Marxist aesthetics and in *Inquiries into the Fundamentals of Aesthetics*. In 1968 I was branded a revisionist and prohibited from teaching. With time I was allowed to publish again, but only essays in periodicals of minor importance.

It would be an exaggeration to suggest that Marxism did not survive without my presence and influence. Certainly it did, but despite its further dissemination, it was strikingly jejune. Only a few texts withstood the test of scholarly criticism, and these were historical studies. It is worth noting that Bohdan Dziemiłok, then in Lublin, who with his group endeavored to further the Marxist approach, wrote a highly instructive book on the interwar Polish aesthetic tradition as well as several illuminating articles on 20th century American aesthetic axiology. His approach and procedure was by no means 'pure' Marxism; he

attempted to follow the path laid down by Tatarkiewicz, i.e., to combine a systematic grasp and a historically detailed analysis focusing on conceptual and semantic issues. In the 70s and 80s the most outstanding work came from Władysław Stróżewski, the Krakow phenomenologist (with neo-Thomist tendencies) who provided a many-sided and inventive investigation of the dialectics of the creative process. In this period, I turned to the newest phenomena on the artistic scene and shifted my interest, step by step, to the philosophy of culture as the most adequate and promising background for philosophical considerations of the arts.

It is notorious that artists respond most sensitively and quickly to recent civilizational and cultural transformations. The informational, technological, and consumer societies that brought about the so-called 'post-industrial revolution' in all social spheres were challenged at the other pole by counter-cultural movements of different magnitude, scope, and conjuncture. These potent stimuli had to be taken into account immediately: artistic practice was embodied essentially in diverse anti-art programs which made the entire inherited aesthetic baggage suspect or altogether obsolete. In Poland, artists, especially of the middle and younger generations, who were oriented to the West, in particular the avant-garde, followed the same path. After 1956 socialist realism was dismissed as a colossal mistake. The ruling establishment reacted coquettishly to the newly formed avant-garde movement: it was tolerated, even supported, so long as it maintained an apolitical attitude and engaged only in experimental ventures. Only in those cases when its message was openly 'anti-socialist' or explicitly hostile (for instance, the Eight Day Theater in Poznan, or an exhibit in the Warsaw University Gallery entitled 'The Muzzles' by a certain Grzegorz Kowalski) did the censor intervene promptly. The Polish anti-art movement, which flourished like mushrooms after a soaking rain, called for fresh ideas and theoretical instruments.

I was compelled to ask whether art and aesthetics make sense and, if so, what its actual status and its goals are. I confronted the problem of elitist art in contrast to mass art, their possible interaction, and their place in present-day Polish culture. It would be too simple to say that the Marxist ideological and philosophical arsenal ceased to be useful

from this clearly altered perspective. It helped to shed light on the dialectics of alienation and de-alienation, on surrender to or revolt against reification. Nonetheless, most of the 19th century concepts, of which Marxist aesthetics was a faithful bearer and herald, turned out to be of no use. Such notions as, among others, art for the 'masses' confronted with the mass art of the actual civilizational breakthrough were of no avail in disentangling the educational politics of culture and genuine expectations as well as the demands of the regular audience. My works from the 80s concerning the crisis of the idea of art and the anti-aesthetics which meditates upon its own shaky endowment led me to inquire into the problem of the cultural crisis taken in general terms. It became obvious to me that it would be an inadmissible and unrewarding strategy to turn a blind eye to the radical transfigurations which are taking place within and outside the present-day artistic world. My colleagues and former students also began to join in the battle I waged against worn-out premisses and assumptions. Virtually everyone agreed with my critical arguments, but some quarreled with my specific vocabulary or with my contention that the aesthetic and artistic collapse is allegedly related to the crisis of culture which in my view needs explanation first of all. However, there were, in Poland, other insightful proposals: for instance, to interpret art as a constant game which ignores present-day civilizational transformations, or else to note the ceaseless changes in the definitions of art by virtue of which the anti-art phenomenon I accentuated is reduced to one of many successive analytico-semantic moves triggered by a new psycho-social conjunction of tastes and crystallized in a new class of 'family resemblances'. In this debate I continued to adhere to my position. The character of the debate sheds ample light on the fact that Polish philosophy of art at the threshold of the 90s hardly preserved, never mind respected, any salient traces of the Marxist perspective.

Concluding, I can epitomize the point I wanted to drive home in the following way: the bankruptcy of 'real socialism' in its political and economic aspects was preceded by the weakening and, later, virtual dismantling of the Marxist world-view as the mainstay of the humanities. In Poland, this process of gradual abandonment of Marxist ideology lasted at least two decades. For this reason, I am inclined to affirm

that the dramatic transformations of consciousness and the conspicuous distance between the imported Soviet theories and Polish scholarly life influenced to a large extent the decline of the governing system in 1989.

3. In order to approach correctly the contemporary crisis of culture, I plunged with fascination into the vicissitudes of the idea of cultural crisis starting in the 19th century with Henry Adams, W. Rathenau, O. Spengler, St. I. Witkiewicz, P. Valery, and ended my research with Adorno's and Horkheimer's *Dialectics of Enlightenment* written at the end of World War II. After reading and re-reading much material I risked, despite ever mounting difficulties, a classification of thinking on the matter and arranged a typology of approaches based on the factor(s) the given authors considered as the prevailing movers in the critical situation. Whatever factors they charged with being the causes of the cultural crisis — nature (as in Henry Adams and Freud) or social reality, and within its confines the frenzy of trivial democratization and the effects of the mass-man (e.g., Ortega y Gasset), over-mechanization and over-organization of the social fabric (e.g., Rathenau and Mannheim), the loss of God and religious belief (e.g., Berdjaev, Maritain, Zdziechowski), the instrumentalization of scientific rationality and thus the emptying of human existence of its metaphysical meaning (e.g., Jaspers, Huizinga, Heidegger, Witkiewicz), the return of dictatorial, totalitarian barbarism under the guise of Reason or Unreason (Znaniecki, Ortega y Gasset, Adorno and Horkheimer) — in every instance I came across the same denominator: the crisis of culture has been regarded as the symptom but also the derivative of civilizational victories stamped into the entire social structure which gave credence to a totally new axiological hierarchy. The hallmark of the crisis was not the crisis of distinct, so-called highest, values, but rather the defence of their indispensability in the misty aura of the historical watershed which ushered in a vertiginous flow of 'conquista' — the ruthless exploitation of nature, bureaucratization, the levelling of dispositions and urges, as well as an addiction to increasing material goods. Hence, I proposed to conceive culture as a given set of values, norms, ideals, and a certain way of life according to axiological paradigms.

Culture, then, means one thing to those who consent to the hard factual scale of goods and something else again to those who cannot

accept this scale. The empirical and normative concepts of culture were always in conflict or, at least, in a state of constant tension. However, the conflict reaches its climax precisely when the issue arises whether or not there is a cultural crisis. Those who proclaim its existence, among whom I count myself, see unresolved problems everywhere. The muddle is more visible the more civilizational triumphs are juxtaposed with the contrasting uneasiness, anxiety, and sense of void which mankind is suffering. Those who deny its existence, who see instead a riot of diverse fulfilled needs, champion the sound impulse to aspire to as much comfort as possible. They dismiss the — according to them — futile debates about the painful absence of the transcendent dimension which they consider to be either a sheer luxury for the sophisticated or a melancholic substitute for this-worldly circumstantial miseries.

Reflection on the self-appointed computer-minded benefactors of mankind, on the epidemic of production for production's sake that in the end provides gears to infinite consumption, and on the unavoidable hazardous consequences of the obsolescence principle, brought me to the obscure issue of postmodernism. It had been knocking at my door since the early 80s by virtue of the heroic efforts of the newest avant-garde to survive the assault launched by recent artistic developments — pastiche and parody-bound eclectic literature, architecture, film, theater, and the Neue Wilde current. But I was unable to come to grips with postmodernism until I examined its context, viz., its socio-cultural hotbed and its philosophical counterpart. Postmodernist verdicts about the end of utopian emancipatory projects as well as the absurdity of any attempts to subvert the status quo, the belief, too, about the irrevocable decay of the elites (i.e., the usurpers of the role of humanity's legislators and educators), hinged upon the problematic human lot at the very heart of the discussion about the actual unprecedented cultural crisis. The same should be said with regard to the postmodernist confirmation of the hegemony of such phenomena as the mass-man, the heterogeneity, the arbitrary mixing of past and present, and permissiveness turned into a sacred rule.

What has all this to do with Poland? Is there a crisis of culture? No doubt there is, but of a sort completely different from the one described in the advanced Western nations. There — superabundance, the dazzling variety of wares exchanged easily and voraciously from day to

day, the absence of existential vigilance and the need to resist anything at all, the lack of concern, as if the world was free of cracks requiring repair, the question "where are we heading?" deemed nonsensical, no slogans other than those championing what is private (*laissez-aller* from top to bottom), the allergy to masterplans. Here, quite the reverse — scarcity, the hopeless fight to obtain West-European eggs in our basket, devotion to some or less definite standards of good and evil, frequent ideological intransigence (bordering on blindness to other points of view), constant worry whether the prospects are bright enough, and instead of indifference to one's brethren, the alas not too frequent desire for retaliation or revenge. The Polish crisis is — let me repeat the banal truth — basically of an economic character, nevertheless it rests also on the awareness of civilization backwardness that is not the fault of the nation. But are the Poles themselves really not guilty? Is it really the Soviet-established communist morass that pushed them politically and socially to the level of a second-rate phenomenon? What about our culture? Did it only linger a while on the paths laid down by Westerners? What about the Church and the Christian obligations which have forged the world-view of the majority? Is there something like a peculiar home-grown myopia? Did the humanities commit themselves to articulating indigenous experience or did they emulate foreign thought-patterns, adopting or refuting them? All these issues call for an extensive analysis. I shall try to sketch a few tentative answers.

4. The Polish 'crisis' can well be put in square quotes as it is minor, indeed irrelevant, in comparison with the turmoil of values going on in the frontlines of most civilizationally advanced nations. The Polish problem is due to the transitional periods which, let me recall, have reoccurred cyclically from 1918. Poland regained independence then, but the aftermath of one-hundred twenty years of unfreedom left its citizens deprived of socio-political and economic normalcy and maturity. In 1939 came the next defeat: the Nazi and Soviet occupation. It backfired on the then fragile Polish sense of what genuine parliamentary democracy entails. Further, the year 1944 marked the complete break with the past — since then Poles have lived in a condition of hypocrisy or schizophrenia, caught between their attachment to their Latin grass-roots culture and subjected at the same time to Asiatic principles. On

the one hand, they were ensnared in the sirene-like charms of a refined, humanistic ideology, and, on the other hand, they were plunged into an entirely contrary practice which denied with every step the European ideals of modernity. Finally, in 1989 the successive destabilization took place that could hardly help in reassessing, in a tempered, quiet mood, the possible positive sides of the forty-five year para-Soviet existence. The Polish 'crisis' resembles then a recurring serious illness from which, once the critical point has passed, social and national life recovers once again. Nonetheless, the backbone of crucial values — exactly those denigrated by the consumerist societies in the West — endured unimpaired. Intending neither malice nor misstatement one should say that due to Poland's historical vicissitudes and civilizational lag the situation boils down to virtue by necessity. This also explains why the regional deficiencies and dangers are of a peculiar nature.

Let me begin with the Church and the Roman Catholic religion as they delineate the manner of thinking, feeling, and behavior of most Poles. It is well-known that during the period of the communist regime the Church's authority was fortified very considerably. It became the fortress of Christian and national identity, the shelter of sovereignty of mind and soul. Because of frequent harassment and circumstantial persecution, priests were looked upon with the deepest sympathy as victims of alien forces or in extreme cases as heroes and martyrs. It is worth remembering that the recent rise of the Church's status would not have occurred were it not for its inner evolution in the wake of Vatican II and, to an equal degree, the imposition by coercion of a political system. *Aggiornamento* determined the charismatic role of the Roman Catholic presence which was entrenched in all spheres of Polish life.

However, being a part of the organic Polish tissue the Church was never beyond criticism and distrust. The last two years bear witness to the menaces which have to be named outright. First of all, the clericalism, which had seemed to be the exorcized ghost of the interwar period, re-emerged. Religious culture taken in global terms turns out not to be sufficiently influenced and stimulated by the new lessons of Vatican II. The thin veneer of enlightened and missionary Christianity was rubbed away as soon as small political parties as well as major or secondary politicians declared themselves the exclusive owners of the

Catholic doctrine and fingered the scapegoats for punishment. Many of the clergy once involved in the anti-Communist struggle now advance their political commitments from the pulpit. The episcopal hierarchy protests, but not strongly enough. Fr. Joseph Tischner, the foremost Catholic philosopher from the Papal Theological Academy in Krakow, warned in an excellent article entitled "Christianity in the Post-Communist Void" (*Tygodnik Powszechny*, April 7, 1991) that the Church, which was powerful when it was unable to exert material power, can now become enthralled with itself and thus powerless while holding the political reins. Communism was a substitute and fake religion, a religion of politics embodied in the ubiquitous Leviathan. As soon as the Church turns religion into politics, a permanent threat exists that it will parody the communist absolute which itself was a parody of the authentic religious world-view. I do not maintain that the Polish situation approaches the Khomeiny model; I tend rather to the idea that there is a potential for 'irlandisation'. In contradistinction to the modern state which warrants all creeds as well as the civil rights of non-believers, this means that political and social decisions become dependent on the ecclesiastical bureaucracy and their version of what is the just human ethos. Yet I do not think that the spiritual incentives of Vatican II are absent or without vitality in Poland. On the contrary, among lay Catholic intellectuals and artists, among the majority of students, and also in select, in particular academic, circles of the clergy, this trend is overwhelming and is spreading. Nevertheless, I fear that the Pope's writings are not read as widely and deeply as they should be.

The great Inquisitor firmly maintains his stance against Christ preaching the evangelic wisdom. The clericalist temptations which unfortunately take precedence can be summarized as follows: genuine spiritual leadership is replaced by a false one, the ultimate vision of Christianity founded on the paradigm of individual liberty, which opens itself to God, and on the ethical responsibility for oneself in relation to the Other is superseded by institutional supremacy. This brings me closer to my second qualification: the Catholic Church dismantled the Soviet reality by opposing to the faceless collectivity the spontaneous *communitas* and left the human will free to be with or without God. However, the Christian *communitas* can be interpreted in at least two ways which are in conflict with one another. Either it is understood as a

distinct population of believers who patronizingly consider all the rest as the flock of perhaps unconscious sinners and stick to their gospel and dogmas as the supreme truth, or, in accordance with the teaching of Vatican II, *communitas* is addressed as well *ad gentes* who are not Christian, but who are likewise imbued with the sense of the Sacred and can expect God's grace no less than the Church's proselytizers. Here the concern is with tolerance or intolerance, either tinging the faith with some sort of xenophobic superiority or purifying it in a benign dialogue with people who think and feel in different ways. The bent towards the evangelic attitude versus catechetical rigor, the choice of the ethical versus the organizational is a difficult wager, because every church is caught in the contradiction between its specific apostolic vocation and the ecumenical assumption of God's omnipresence under various forms and faces. Hence, mere assent to the given *communitas* without taking into account its relation to other creeds and to non-believers could unwittingly become the symptom of veiled monopoly and an insult to them. I hold the view that such miscalculation often occurs in my country as a consequence of a mediocre religious culture. But I am also fully aware that the exigencies of the Church do quarrel to some degree with the demands of religious ecumenism.

Let me demonstrate this with an example that is most profound from the philosophic point of view and most authoritative from a theological standpoint, viz., the Pope's encyclical *Redemptoris Missio* (December 7, 1990). The Pope, fully conscious of the dilemmas of his reasoning, asks how the apostolic mission of any given Church can be compatible with interreligious dialogue, and how the goal of converting non-believers to a definite creed related to a definite God can be reconciled with the idea of the all pervasive Divine presence. The Roman Catholic, like all Christians, has to take for granted that the salvation of mankind can be fulfilled only by Christ and the sacrament of baptism. At the same time Jean Paul II teaches in his splendid argument that every person disposes of his/her right to opt for the religion he/she finds most illuminating and to disclaim any religious option if in the search for the moral light he/she fails to gain faith. On one side, the Church, in one concrete form or another, is solely destined to incarnate God's grace in us; on the other, the invisible grace can be accessible in many Churches and outside of them as well — *spiritus flat ubi vult*. The topos

of Christ's Resurrection and Redemption is the universal model of man's pilgrimage towards transcendence and the Almighty as well as the unique synthesis of theo- and homo-centrism. However, on the other hand, it is one of the dogmas belonging to this very creed and rationalized in a specific form by the given clergy. The brilliance of the encyclical rests on laying bare this unsolved dilemma, although the Pope does try to convince the reader, as he did before in the "Letter to the Bishops of Asia," (June 23, 1990) that there is no discordance between Christ and Logos, universal missionary zeal and ecclesiology, religious illumination and any given Church's natural expansion.

I myself was left in a state of confusion; I cannot grasp how the paradox can be eliminated. Ecumenism seems to be at odds with the idea that there are religions of different worth and the one ranked at the top reveals the fullest providential truth. Although contemporary "apostles" do not employ swords, but only suggest what the Mystery of existence is on the basis of their experience and vocation (the return to the old *parresia*), doubt persists as to how to conduct a fruitful inter-religious dialogue, when one feels and knows that he/she is the only and rightful vessel of the Ultimate Wisdom. Now, "*Redemptoris Missio*," because of its intellectual depth enables reflection on the inherent narrowness of our faith and enhances religious as well as evangelical consciousness. But the cultural practice of the Church in my country stumbles on the indigenous ecclesiastical conviction that Roman Catholics — by far the largest community which believes that the only true Christ belongs to them — legitimately enjoy special privileges in all social spheres.

Finally, the third minor qualification. The social doctrine of the Vatican, as expounded chiefly in the Pope's encyclicals from *Laborem Exercens* to *Sollicitudo rei socialis*, and most recently *Centesimus annus*, implies in equal proportion objections addressed to the communist collectivist system and to all-permissive capitalism. The doctrine calls for care of the economically weak, a state-interventionist policy to guarantee social security, the minimization of unemployment, and the peremptory rejection of the Hobbesian war of men among men as wolves. The Pope has emphasized repeatedly that neither heaps of money nor the greatest technological achievements, but the mentality and habits pertaining to man's integral development, his being human

rather than his being acquisitive and consumerist, are the principal aims of our earthly fate. There is something tragi-farcical, therefore, in the circumstance that, at this historical turning point, a host of Polish politicians and ideologists displaying the Christian emblem on their breasts with mouths full of enthusiasm for the Pope, should confess a doctrinaire liberalist program of the 19th century variety (let the rich get richer and let the paupers suffer by virtue of their incapacity to compete with the former). An association calling itself "The solidarity of Labor," which is atheistic, corresponds much more closely to the Pope's encyclical declarations. Fr. Tischner — who is politically uncommitted — supports this view with talent and erudition. But the contradictions signalled above are virtually taboo. No nation-wide debates focus on the questions which seem to me to be fundamental, on the one hand, the role of Church if it really aspires to constitute *koinonia* and, on the other hand, the kind of economic policy to adopt if the budding Polish democracy is not to be ruined by adventurist, free-lanced liberalism.

To sum up, I would say that the peculiarity of the Polish 'crisis' lies not so much in the harmful appreciation of 'to have' to the detriment of 'to be' (which is the leitmotif of all the papal warnings), but much deeper. It is found in the shallow understanding of transcendent value and its concomitant ethics, in the disproportionate grasp of the theo- and homo-centric aspects of existence (either one is downgraded at the cost of overestimating the other, or both are deformed), and finally in the caesarism which still haunts offices (including those of Church) and minds. Poland has a long way to go to reach cultural maturity.

Does this mean, however, that the Poles have lost forty-five years living in a cultural wilderness with waning creative incentives? Patent nonsense! The very fact of dedication and attachment to religious ideals, their persistence in connection with the Roman Catholic church when in the Western world secularization has run rampant (or lately diverse sectarian attitudes and a new gnosis) bear witness to the original 'genius loci'. All the more so if we remember that during this period intellectual catholicism considerably deepened and widened.

One of the most striking paradoxes of Polish culture in the years 1945–1959 was its special status precisely as a result of the ruling system and its asymmetry and asynchrony with the parallel evolution in the West. The fight for moral dignity was transferred to the domain of

culture. There were, of course, state subsidies, awards, passports, a much better standard of life for artists and intellectuals than elsewhere in society. There were many fellow travellers and many who were seduced, especially in the initial years just after World War II, by the prospects of the Divine Kingdom on earth built by us before our very eyes. Nevertheless, the best specimens of art, scholarship (I have in mind the humanities), and philosophy were the products of dissent and, to the growing dismay of the party beurocratic elite, expressed concern that the great promises had been deformed into caricatures. The more the initial euphoria was dampened by the socio-political reality, the more insistent became the complaints, then the remorse, finally the assaults on the establishment.

The ultimate consequence of the increasing conflict was the emergence of the quite extensive sub-culture of the mid-seventies. The communist system, in contradistinction to the Common Market and the postmodernist perspective, cherished and pampered intellectuals, not experts. This attitude involved a distinctive constellation of issues; it implied either the troubadour's dedication to real socialism or invited a perverse toying with the power structure on the part of the half-dissenting, or it became a breeding ground for revolt. As already noted, after 1981 it was the last eventuality that prevailed. Another aspect of the same pattern was Western curiosity and a priori sympathy for cultural dissenters and rebels. Hence in due course many Polish novels, film scenarios, and theater pieces were translated abroad, and many became hits.

I am far from the opinion that this popularity had primarily political undertones. The historical ambiguities were such that Polish culture, which had plummeted during the age of darkness, thrived and blossomed during the same period. But wasn't this the sign of normalcy? Giving testimony to what took place in the new Calibanic system, retaining credibility by telling the truth in the face of sheer propaganda or wishful thinking, recounting nightmares and at the same time revealing the positive pulsations as well as the pathos of everyday existence — in all these things Polish artists and thinkers, thanks to their critical distance, left the mark of their genuine vocation.

It is noteworthy that, thanks to their impact on political history

(which is the peculiar trait of the Polish experience since the loss of independence at the end of the 18th century and the birth of the romantic heritage), intellectuals and artists enjoyed a heroic comeback on the national stage in years 1989–1990. They were seen as the prophets of a good cause and the bearers of ethical conscience. They dealt a deadly blow, or so it was believed, to the hated regime by supporting with their charisma and intelligence the mutinous workers. Today it is clear that theirs was short-lived victory. New challenges came to the fore — the elite ceased to be fashionable, the spearheads of change should be the private entrepreneurs, politicians, trade-union officials.

In any case, Polish culture has made its way — at least in the case of such dominant personalities as Miłosz, Lem, Penderecki, Łutosławski, Grotowski, Kantor, Mrożek, Abakanowicz, Wajda, Zanussi, Polański, Andrzejewski, Konwicki, Szymborska, J. J. Szczepański, et al. — into the world. Let me add that, in the domain of music, the fine arts, and applied art, there was no pressure from the political power for thirty-five years. The Polish avant-garde was free to join its Western counterpart in all their consecutive phases. Nor does blame accrue to the political leadership that it blocked the free circulation of classical writers who like Witold Gombrowicz, St. Ign. Witkiewicz, and Bruno Schulz were ill-regarded in the early fifties and censored on account of their suspect 'counter-ideology'. After October 1956 their works, with the exception of Gombrowicz's *Journals*, were published in thousands of copies, and the communist establishment was proud of their worldwide renown. The amusing and astounding thing was that dissenters also kept the system running; its rulers could — and did — say that they are not repressive at all if so many reproaches are publicly expressed with regard to their way of governing the country. The only 'blasphemy' not tolerated was an artist's escape (Miłosz was the chief protagonist in this respect) or direct attacks on the communist system in the émigré Parisian Literary Institute (e.g., Stefan Kisielewski's novels published under a pseudonym which was hardly a secret for long). The problem which requires separate attention, and to which I shall return in my concluding remarks, is the present-day situation of Polish art, which thrived on contest, and its privileged status within the country's borders

as well as beyond them. Today, with its changing role, reflection on social reality, resignation from utopian—emancipatory blueprints, it has to face unknown problems.

I would like to concentrate briefly on philosophy in Poland, yesterday and today. I have already stressed that no trend existing prior to 1939 has become obsolete. The accomplishments of the analytico-semantic school (tied to the Wiener Kreis) flourished in the decades after WW II; no Marxist criticism could manage to question their efficacy and success. Phenomenology had its heyday in the years 1950–70. Apart from Neo-Thomism, a new Catholic philosophy gradually emerged, stimulated partly by Ingarden (for example, W. Stróżewski) and by Heidegger (for instance, J. Tischner); the new tendencies were furthered by combining the *via antiqua* with the philosophy of dialogue, drawing on the works of Jewish thinkers (M. Buber, F. Rozenzweig, and E. Levinas). The boundary lines between different philosophic standpoints were blurred. Hermeneutics is a good example: Gadamer and Ricoeur were assessed differently by the Poznan Marxists, Warsaw semioticians, the young Christian academics from Krakow and Lublin.

The outstanding generator of philosophical unrest was for many decades Leszek Kołakowski; his influence remains unsurpassed. His philosophy of culture and individual existence stood the test of historical upheavals. He discovered novel horizons of thought, went right to the heart of the issues he examined, which were always pivotal. He has no peer when fathoming the depth and breadth of the questions he raises, nor in respect of his literary talents. The range of his philosophical interests is now so extensive (among other reasons, because of increasing specialization in today's culture) that any attempt at a synoptic rendering of the endeavors in this domain misfires from the outset.

Today, I do not see any definite schools of thought, but rather particular individuals of outstanding qualities, and I would not risk the judgment that at this juncture any definite trend dominates the field. One should still not underestimate the vitality of the Marxist-inspired approach; it will suffice here to mention Marek Siemek (University of Warsaw) who ingeniously unites Marx and Hegel. He looks to the second to — no joke or perfidy intended — put the first on his feet, and is engaged in a fruitful discussion with the Frankfurt School by asking whether

instrumental reason is really an impediment to mankind's development. What upsets me — despite the many outstanding achievements of contemporary Polish thinkers (e.g., Barbara Skarga's meditations on philosophy of history and history of philosophy, or M. Przełęcki's inquiries into the foundation of non-confessional Christianity, or S. Amsterdamski's critical analysis of scientific rationality) — is the almost complete silence about the recent turn to a philosophically justified postmodernism. Whereas, as I noted several times above, the postmodernist mood or an unconscious *forma mentis* of this kind is voiced in the public sphere, for instance in the disastrous distrust of the elites and in the belief that the demise of the intellectuals and artists as Poland's misguided 'gardeners' and 'legislators' is well-deserved, the philosophers appear to overlook entirely the works of the Parisian school (J. Derrida, J. F. Lyotard, G. Deleuze, F. Guattari) and their American or German counterparts (R. Rorty, O. Marquard, W. Welsch). In the given socio-political and cultural structure of Poland deliberations on *posthistoire*, on whether it is reasonable to drop the Utopian perspectives, or on the dangers of leaving aside the past and the future to nourish oneself only with the instantaneous now, are seemingly off target. As I argued before, here *posthistoire* does not have a fertile soil in which to germinate. Nonetheless, the duties of any philosophy are to deliberate on the destinies and dilemmas of the entire civilization and culture, unless one consents to one's own parochialism. By the way, this task was constantly fulfilled by Polish philosophers in our century, and Leszek Kołakowski's oeuvre is the best example. Moreover, because the postmodernist challenge is knocking at our doors, it makes sense to wager a forecast about what an unusual explosive mixture would be like if the indigenous tradition conjoined with the anti-philosophy of the scholars from Paris, etc.

It may be that the lack of response from my colleagues to the postmodernist provocations stems from their firm conviction that philosophy — whether religious or not — is *aere perennius*, and it would be a waste of energy to study the deconstructive arguments which lead nowhere. My contention is totally opposite. I find that these intellectual provocations are to be removed in a thorough-going debate. The surrounding chaotic world does not appear to dissolve itself automatically into comforting, orderly reconstructions.

I do subscribe, subversively, to the starting point of philosophic postmodernism. It is perfectly correct when it openly or implicitly presupposes the religious (and theological) character of philosophizing. Indeed, philosophy is the secular equivalent of the same ultimate yearning for absolute principles. The disagreement begins with my counter-assumption (which is at the outset swept aside by the postmodernist thinkers), according to which the source of these ultimate questions is the ineradicable *condition humaine*. However, deconstructionists themselves provide the necessary evidence. Questioning all inherited categories — substance, arché, the primal source, telos, mimesis, the individual I, the collective subject, signs with their polyvalent meanings, the sense of history, the ethical imperative, etc., etc. — their radical negativism leads them to a dead-end, i.e., to the counter-arché declared in this or that form. For example, as chaosmos vs. cosmos, or *différance* as the basis of intertextual games, or the unexplained ought which in the given context transcends moral relativism, or the diverse heterogeneous agencies entangled in “petites histoires” which constitute the crucial frame of reference, or finally interhuman solidarity against ontological contingency.

Odo Marquard aptly speaks of *das Prinzipielle des Nichtprinzipiellen*. Philosophy cannot give up the principle which is at stake and fuels thought, but truly these principles vary and quarrel with one another. The problem of answers is not the same as that of questions. Religion and theology, as I would argue, must provide solutions that are binding once and for all. Philosophical discourse proposes the most relevant full-fledged world design according to assumed presuppositions, but it is notoriously aware that there are many competent world projects and the duel between them goes on infinitely. One searches after the most convincing reasons to justify one's option, but at the back of the mind there is the ever observant metaphilosophical consciousness which says that rivalry between the best reasons can never be superseded.

Kořakowski, in his excellent *Horror metaphysicus* pointed out that there is no ecumenical philosophical language; the strategies to absolutize the structure and meaning of reality are multiple and mutually exclusive. But what cannot be abandoned — except at the price of extreme nihilism — are the questions concerning the absolute, the ought, etc. So if my reading of postmodernist stratagems, according to

Derrida's formula — *la lecture symptomale* —, is at all persuasive, I would emphasize that postmodernists either have to philosophize in transforming their tools into ‘positive negativity’ or they are compelled to lose their taste for philosophy and bid it farewell.

It needs to be asked therefore what their claims about the beyond of philosophic thinking amount to, and what the relation of this beyond is to the actual consumerist mentality. Responses can vary. Derrida speaks of rhetoric which is neither philosophy nor literature; Deleuze and Guattari, of schizo-analysis which pertains to the rhisomatics of de-territorialized (nomadic and thus forever unstable) ideas; Lyotard, of “autre savoir,” another kind of knowledge which rests on desire, its libidinal pulsations; Rorty, of the artistic, strictly personal, world-view, without any imperialistic drives to impose it as the cosmic or historical pattern; Marquard, of “transzendente Belletristik” saturated with healthy pyrrhonism; Welsch, of “transversale Vernunft” which assents to controlling one line of thought by its opposite without any chance of their convergence and consensus. All these responses confirm the heterogeneity and all-permissiveness of approaches, attitudes, behaviors, which allegedly should support man's freedom in opposition to totalizing philosophies.

Thus post-philosophical postmodernism legitimizes the consumerist era, being itself its legitimate child. An interesting criticism of this standpoint was launched by Frederic Jameson in his polemic with J. F. Lyotard (see his forward to *The Postmodern Condition. A Report on Knowledge*, Minnesota 1984). He contends that resignation from the great narratives for the sake of language games, performative-pragmatic scientific investigation rooted in computerized technology, and joyful paralogisms all derive from the third stage of capitalism (in Ernst Mandel's sense), i.e., the global expansion of machine-produced raw materials and foodstuffs. In my opinion the phenomenon does not require an analysis of this sort, i.e., one from within the context of a revived Marxist narrative. What is essential are the consequences which Jameson has unerringly drawn out. Lyotard wants to have his cake and eat it, too: he would like to continue the latest avant-garde revolt and conform simultaneously to techno-scientific paradigms. His approach to capitalism is ambiguous — he tries to combine at once the fascination of the consumer for ever fresh novelties with a protest against the

hegemony of commodities and huge private ownership. It is a strategem that does not work. The postmodernist paralogisms take vengeance on their author and his colleagues. Within these boundaries the human being undergoes a surgical operation that flattens and benumbs him by cutting off — artificially, in my view — the 'religious gland', one of the secretions of which is philosophizing.

6. In my concluding remarks I will address very briefly the question of the possible obligations of Polish art, the humanities, and philosophy at this transitional moment. But first let me comment on a more fundamental problem, viz., that of the supposed absence of the middle-class considered by certain heralds of re-established capitalism as the foremost political class. I think that view is a grave mistake rife with unhealthy practical consequences. It is as grave as the other widespread belief about the extinction of the elite which should be replaced by mere professionals (ex-combattants in the struggle with the communist regime). It is myopic in my view to move away from the belief that highly enlightened people constitute the primary political class, assuming of course that the idea of democracy does not boil down to the triviality that the majority is always right and has the right to impose its will on the rest of society. That is why I would wish for and expect an earnest public debate on this topic initiated by the political scientists.

With the strengthening of the idea of the nation-state, in the post-communist world, the Western political thinkers confront the problem of such autonomy with regard to the European Market's cosmopolitan tendency. We are nevertheless forced by the specific situation to forge ahead on our own. In which direction? By accepting the program of the quickest possible coalition with the European community, the program outlined by Tadeusz Mazowiecki's team, and fortunately continued by the present government. It would by the way be good medicine against the native microbes of xenophobia and parochialism.

Now, with regard to the artists, especially the most ambitious among them, they have at their disposal all the means to synthesize the historical experiences of Polish semi-communism as well as to penetrate into the actual transfigurations of social and individual psychology. The worst and cheapest solution would be to flow with the postmodernist wave. Participating in the free-flowing mix-up of fragments from the

distant and recent past, preparing eclectic gulashes, making laughing stock of all ideological projects, and finally flirting with pastiche and parody — these are counterfeit passports to international culture. This puppet-show is not ours. The philosophers of culture should then persist in denouncing the pitfalls and traps of postmodernism and tackle, first of all, the meaning of the actual turnover in the national consciousness. So much enthusiasm which was quickly replaced by that much disappointment. Because of the historical and regional reasons so many people do feel unsure of the future and frightened. Why so? And why are so many of the youth opting for exodus? A hard intellectual enterprise indeed. Social philosophers have to deal with these questions, too. They will hopefully contribute to the analyses of the Dead Utopia and sensibly separate the wheat from the chaff, that is, the ever-vital master narratives from degenerate modes of thinking and acting. The philosophy of religion (and religious philosophy) must recognize the devil in us and recognize that exorcizing him will not heal us. We have to live with him and, if possible, rein in his outbursts. I would extend this issue by demanding from the intellectuals, artists, and politicians that they train their sights lucidly on the evil, call it by name, and bring it to bay within their best possibilities. I am afraid that we cannot do more than tame the permanent presence of the devil and hope thus to weaken his effects on us.

The list of what should be done could be prolonged; it is like a child's dreams. Besides, my essay must come to an end. Because it is written in a solemn tone, let me complete it in a strikingly frivolous vein. Most probably, cultural reality will assume a completely different shape and all my 'oughts' will be worth about as much as mourning at a funeral. But why should philosophy be an accurate prophecy, and not, as it commonly has been, idle meditation and speculation?

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