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God and Post-Modern Thought:

Philosophical Issues in the Contemporary Critique of Modernity

Polish Philosophical Studies, IX

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ABBREVIATIONS

FeR	John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio* (1999)
ORT	Richard Rorty, *Objectivity, Relativism, and Truth* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991)
PG	Graham Ward, ed., *The Postmodern God: A Theological Reader* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997)
CIS	Richard Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989)
TeP	Pierre Gisel and Patrick Evrard, eds., *La Théologie en Postmodernité* (Geneva: Labor et fides, 1996)
VPT	David Ray Griffin, William A. Beardslee, and Joe Holland, *Varieties of Postmodern Theology* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989)

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PREFACE
TO THE ENGLISH EDITION

At the initial stage of its development, postmodernism was a reaction to an uncritical fascination with the ideas of Enlightenment and to the Nietzschean announcement of the death of God. Its claims seemed to be justified in an age when the faith that progress would accompany rational reflection had broken down in the barracks of Auschwitz and exceptionally profound cultural transformations led to the dominance of the principle: "Let us live as if God did not exist." Those ideas pervaded the works expressive of the earliest form of postmodernism; they underwent, however, deep changes as a result of general cultural developments, as well as of controversies within an outlook marked by the disillusionment and doubt typical of postmodernism.

The views of the late Richard Rorty (†2007) may be taken as characteristic expression of the transformations of the age. During the period of his fascination with pragmatism he considered atheism as a manifestation of the mature philosophical attitude. Under the influence of the variety of postmodernism developed by Gianni Vattimo, Rorty moderated his position, claiming that "atheism (objective evidence for the non-existence of God) is just as untenable as theism."[1] In an intellectual climate where relativism and nihilism were offered as an alternative to what religions had earlier proposed, new ideas began to grow: the ideas that strove to safeguard the basic principles of humanism and to find a hope, any kind of hope, that could act as a shield against despair.

The ideas of postmodernism, however, are not developing in purely intellectual spaces; in this case, the interactions with the pragmatics of consumption prove particularly important. The society of the spectacle and the supermarket absorbs everything that can be offered as a commodity: ideas, values, programs and principles. The counterculture born of rebellion has been replaced by a mercantile pseudo-spirituality. A relatively mature form of such eclecticism is the attitude that Czesław Miłosz designated as that of "homeless religious minds." The cultural determinants of such an attitude can be found in the phenomenon of "postmodern consumption" and in a practice characteristic of it, sarcastically dubbed McDonaldization of spirituality. It is based on the principle: "We are what we eat, what we build, what we buy." In its generalized form, it announces: "I shop, therefore I am." The classical

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1 Richard Rorty, Gianni Vattimo, *The Future of Religion* (New York: Columbia University Press), 33.

principles of metaphysics are thus supplanted with marketing slogans and advertising jingles.

A Christian reflection on such changes in culture, and especially on the phenomenon of creating a world of artificial absolutes, is presented in the Encyclical Letter of Pope Benedict XVI *Caritas in veritate*. There, an attitude where an instrumental approach to human beings goes hand in hand with indifference towards God is recognized as a threat to humane culture. The death of man is a consequence of the cultural death of God. This may in turn lead to the absolutization of relative values and the loss of the ethical dimension which shows the superiority of moral goodness over effective evil.[2]

Those who sympathize with postmodernism compare the debates it inspires not so much to the banquet (symposium) of Plato as to "a buffet supper in a British pub, where food, drink, and uninhibited conversation can circulate between a long oak bar top and a spitting log-fire."[3] Alongside that developing debate, however, in the very circles under the cultural influence of postmodernism, one can observe the growth of interest in issues central to the Christian intellectual tradition has been growing step by step. This is manifested, for example, in the controversies over the question of relativism[4] and in the criticism of the classical understanding of rationality,[5] as well as in works directly addressing the presence of God[6] and the role of Christ in postmodern culture.[7] Participants in the debate now include not only the classic postmodernist authors, but also Jean-Luc Marion, John D. Caputo, and Daniel Boyarin. Their polemics have become so representative of contemporary thought that Christian authors are sometimes accused of insufficient interest in the output of Michel Foucault, especially in the consequences of his perturbing claim: "The truth will enslave us."[8]

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2 Benedict XVI, *Caritas in veritate,* ¶9.

3 Graham Ward, "Introduction: 'Where We Stand'" in: *The Blackwell Companion to Postmodern Theology*, ed. G. Ward (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), xxv.

4 René Girard and Gianni Vattimo, *Christianity, Truth, and Weakening Faith: A Dialogue*, trans. William McCuaig (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010).

5 Józef Życiński, "The Rationality of Logos instead of the Dictatorship of Relativism," *Acta Philosophica. Intervista Internazionale di Filosofia*, 18 (2009): 1: 43-55.

6 Gianni Vattimo and Carmelo Dotolo, *Dio: la possibilità buona,* (Soveria Manelli: Rubbettino, 2009).

7 Frederiek Depoortere, *Christ in Postmodern Philosophy: Gianni Vattimo, René Girard and Slavoj Žižek,* (London: T&T Clark, 2008).

8 Cezary Kościelniak, *Nowe krytyki Kościoła,* (Cracow: Aureus, 2010), 25.

The philosophical landscape has changed since the first Polish edition of this book and some polemics initially raised by the representatives of postmodernism have lost their edge. The diversity of cultural determinants of theological questions addressed within this trend has been aptly characterized by Oxford Dominican Fergus Kerr who described the authors pursuing the theological themes of postmodernism as: "Jews, Christians and atheists; indebted to Plato, the Bible and Augustine; haunted by Heidegger, Lévinas, Foucault and Derrida; dealing with jazz, the Shoah, the ecological crisis, the American prison system and many other topics. … At the end… you will certainly have seen the variety and vitality of what theologians are doing in these postmodern times."[9]

Despite the evident changes in the views of the representatives of postmodernism themselves, the controversies carried on in the stream of rapid cultural transformations indicate the importance of certain values for the culture of the species with the proud name Homo sapiens. "Thinking man" need not only fulfill consumer and biological needs. He also needs such values as truth, freedom, dialogue and meaning. Those terms were given different senses in different circles of the contemporary thought. The reflection on the multiplicity of tendencies in contemporary postmodernism and on the gradual development of this trend can free us from shallow, superficial fascinations and lead to the discovery of fundamental values that, if missing, leave the human being tragically homeless.

Józef Życiński

9 Fergus Kerr OP, "A Note," in *The Blackwell Companion to Postmodern Theology*, op. cit., p. 1.

INTRODUCTION
IN SEARCH OF TRACES OF THE INVISIBLE

"We have to be held in love, waiting patiently, watching constantly, tracing endlessly the invisible as the visible, the divine as the corporeal, the coming to fulfillment of the eternal Word."[1] These words, full of poetic romanticism, were written by Graham Ward in a work which he characterizes as the postmodernist project in theology. They will come as a surprise to all those who are used to associating postmodernism with the nihilistic denial of meaning, values, and the classical conception of truth. They testify to the fact that we are now witnessing deep transformations in a school of thought which, in its initial development, rejected both the Christian and the Enlightenment traditions and announced that the entry into the radically new stage of cultural development which they called postmodernity would include the end of metaphysics.

It would be a delusion to think that an intellectual, much less an exclusively ideological, school of thought to which the intellectual and cultural legacy of Christianity was completely foreign could develop in European culture. It is true that supporters of the social left[2] and representatives of psychoanalysis played a major role in the development of the French version of postmodernism. If, however, one does not share the extremely radical interpretations of a tradition initiated by Marx and Freud, then there is no reason to see sympathy for the ideas which they represent as opposed to Christian thought or to treat every version of psychoanalysis as a threat to Christianity.

Despite the substantive oversimplifications concerning religion evident in the classical texts of postmodernism, one must take note of the circumstantial bonds connecting it to religion. Thus, Michel Foucault was born into a Catholic family in Poitiers and the Jesuits played a major role in his education. Jacques Marie Lacan was also raised in a Catholic environment. His mother was regarded by the people around her as a mystic; his brother became a Benedictine and a respected theologian. A significant expression of the evolution of Jacques Lacan is the fact that, when he took up the study of psychiatry and rejected Christianity, he expressed his atheistic sympathies by

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1 Graham Ward, "Introduction, or A Guide to Critical Thinking in Cyberspace," in PG, xviii.

2 On the oversimplified interpretation of postmodernism as the ideology of the left, see Barbara Epstein, "Postmodernism and the Left," *New Politics* 6 (1997): 2.

dropping the name "Marie." Georges Bataille, Michel de Certeau, Luce Irigaray, and Julia Kristeva also studied in a Catholic environment. Roland Barthes came from a Protestant family; Jacques Derrida, from a Jewish one.

It is significant that a decided majority of the representatives of postmodernism are French. In light of their difficult hermetic language and their connections to phenomenology, sarcastic commentators have remarked that deconstructionist postmodernism is a kind of French revenge for Heidegger. Even Wolfgang Welsch, who weighs his words carefully, writes about the Francolatry evident in this trend, but goes on to reassure his readers by pointing out that among the authors influential in the rise of postmodernism were "also non-French thinkers such as Kant and Wittgenstein."[3]

Independent of national causes, the reason for the charges of anti-intellectualism directed at postmodernism was antipathy to its philosophical style which combined a lack of concern for elementary precision of expression with literary glibness. That antipathy was only heightened by claims of his supporters that Derrida's literary activity was "impressive, simply incredible, sometimes exceeding the apprehensive capabilities of the reader"[4] or that Derrida's career looks "more like show business than like original speculative inquiry."[5] All this has created a prejudicial climate which has focused attention on the great oversimplifications of postmodernism, while ignoring its valuable proposed solutions to many particular problems.

In its lack of respect for precision and methodological correctness, postmodernism is a humanistic reaction to positivistic models of knowledge. Jerzy Giedymin even suggests that it is the humanists' revenge for the physicalism and scientism which dominated philosophy at the beginning of the twentieth century.[6] Just as in that century the Church paid much attention to the positivists in order to overcome antireligious attitudes among the representatives of the natural sciences, today it must give that same attention to postmodernism. In doing so it must take care to create a climate of openness to the needs and interests both of the creators of culture and of the representatives of the humanities. Where the positivists valued precision and order,

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3 Wolfgang Welsch, *Unsere postmoderne Moderne* (Weinheim: VCH, 1987), 4.

4 Bogdan Banasiak, "Na tropach dekonstrukcji," in Jacques Derrida, *Pismo filozofii* (Cracow: Inter esse, 1993), 13.

5 Ibid., 9.

6 Jerzy Giedymin, "Czy warto przyjąć propozycje tekstualizmu?" in *Dokąd zmierza współczesna humanistyka?*, ed. Teresa Kostyrko (Warsaw: Instytut Kultury, 1994), 41.

postmodernists value artistic imagination and unhampered creative freedom.

Dialogue with postmodernism is particularly necessary now, when the postmodernist critique strikes at the foundations of our culture, bringing with it the danger of nihilism. This is all the more necessary because in the contemporary polemic are found various versions of postmodernism, with quite different sets of values. These include a certain wandering into a cultural desert and an arrogance with respect to the elementary principles of philosophical precision. But there is also a dramatic call from the depths of human suffering.

If one can distinguish four main stages in the development of European culture: Antiquity, the Middle Ages, Modernity, and Postmodernity. the characteristic trait of the latter is the rejection of a faith in progress, science, reason, and universal happiness inspired by the ideas of the Enlightenment. For despite the fact that we have been able to realize the majority of the projects about which the classical proponents of the Enlightenment dreamed, we do not feel any happier than did our ancestors. Progress in technology brought us finally the ovens of the crematoria, while the desire for ideal social systems gave birth to successive versions of totalitarianism. Wiser as a result of our successive disappointments, we look with skepticism at new attempts to formulate those totalizing declarations which expressed in so-called "grand narratives."

Hence, some try to see the essence of the period of postmodernism in escape from a series of delusions and from the foundational principles of an earlier world, in the disarray of opinion, and in the feeling of uncertainty about life which inspires longing for the "lightness of being." The epoch of great disappointments which has been our fate is taken to signify the end of so-called modernity. As postmodern beings we have to give up many ambitious plans and optimistic views of the future. We have to agree to a pluralism of admissible interpretations and to the fundamental uncertainty of all knowledge. We have to accept limitations of the human condition which were ignored by many modern thinkers.

The diverse theses which constitute the postmodern view of culture are unequal in value. The fundamental danger from postmodernism is a nihilism which leads to the self-destruction of philosophy, meaning, and values. Nihilism itself, however, can take various forms posing unequal degrees of danger to a culture. The abolition of classical schemata which some of these forms propose and the deconstruction of the earlier sense of meaningfulness, I think, do not lead to nihilism in the pure sense, but only to a so-called *kenosis* which allows us to grasp a deeper, previously hidden, level of meaning. In that case, an apparent nihilistic aesthetics is in keeping with the *kenosis* of

traditional interpretations and brings new suggestions, significantly more critical than the works of Foucault and Derrida. Through critical reflection on the declared end of metaphysics, such authors declare the end of a certain kind of philosophical consideration, while at the same time emphasizing the need to analyze these same problems with the help of a different conceptual apparatus. Not questioning the cultural characteristics of postmodernity, they turn their attention to the oversimplifications contained in the texts of the representatives of postmodernism.

In this work, I discuss the radical theses of that version of postmodernism which is accused of proclaiming the death of God, of the human subject, of metaphysics, of meaning, and of truth. Pointing out the internal inconsistency hidden in the contemporary critique of those themes, I acknowledge at the same time the point of taking up classical problems in a new language, congenial to the mentality of postmodernity. We can find attempts to develop such a language both among those under the influence of the thought of Nietzsche and among those supporters of postmodernism who avoid those simple generalizations which lead to the deconstruction of the earlier intellectual tradition.

Trying to distinguish between the ideological version of postmodernism and the variant caused by deep cultural transformations, I take as the horizon of evaluation in this work the intellectual perspective of *Fides et Ratio.* There we find a much milder treatment of contemporary postmodernism than it would be possible to expect on the basis of the critical remarks directed at postmodernism by representatives either of analytical philosophy or of the classical philosophy of being. Perhaps the reasons for such a treatment must be sought in the fact that John Paul II is subjecting to evaluation not only the philosophical content of postmodernism, but also its cultural influences in the fields of aesthetics, literature, and even spirituality. Various factors influenced the fact that contemporary disappointment with the negative phenomena of modern culture led to an intensified critique of the legacy of the Enlightenment and to radical attempts to challenge so-called modernity. That phenomenon brought many re-evaluations which formulate the intellectual climate of the contemporary world in a fundamentally different way. Consideration of these changes has led to "our age [being] termed by some thinkers the age of 'postmodernity,'"[7] despite the fact that there are many deep differences in the understanding of that term. Looking for intellectual evaluations of the multi-level legacy of modernity, one must keep in mind the Pope's words that " judgment on what is called 'postmodern' is sometimes

7 FeR, ¶91.

positive and sometimes negative," but "one thing … is certain: the currents of thought which claim to be postmodern merit appropriate attention."[8]

The message of the encyclical is an attitude of methodological openness to the various problems currently under discussion under the influences of postmodernism. It requires one to distinguish between substantive solutions, which are often introduced in a dogmatic and oversimplified way, and their cultural context, which reflects the deep cultural transformations of our time. In the analysis of the essential theses of postmodernism in this book, I have tried to show their cultural context in order—by undertaking the indispensable dialogue—to facilitate an understanding of their origin. At the same time, I have devoted much attention to critical reflection on those theses in which the fascinations and disappointments of our time prevailed over a judgment on the merits of the theses. This approach allows one to preserve the criticism of theses of an ideological character and at the same time to undertake a constructive dialogue about those proposals of postmodernity which must be taken seriously. The God of the postmodernists, then, appears in the disappointments of the nomads of Deleuze and in the experience of open wounds described by Vattimo, just as He once appeared in Augustine's unrest of the heart or in the mystical dark night.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, when positivism was contrasted to religion, Pierre Duhem came to be called a "Catholic positivist." Today, when in many circles postmodernism is thought of as the philosophy of the post-Christian period, one can speak of Catholic postmodernists. These would be authors who want to combine a liberation from the many illusions of the Enlightenment with an openness to the transcendent reality of truth and meaning which are discovered in every period independently of deep and on-going cultural transformations. Not sharing the oversimplified declarations about a post-Christian culture, they treat religion "as a return" in which both "a dormant trace is reawakened" and "a wound reopened,"[9] one that expresses an important truth about man and his search for values and meaning. Reflection on the mystery of death and the experience of prayer, sensitivity to evil and to suffering, questions about guilt and forgiveness, all these define the essential horizon of the great questions of human existence, which have not lost their relevance with the discovery of postmodernity. Along the cultural paths of disappointments and returns, in the experience of new wounds and reconstructed traces, it

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8 FeR, ¶91.

9 Gianni Vattimo, "The Trace of the Trace," in Jacques Derrida and Gianni Vattimo, eds., *Religion* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), 79.

is not possible for there not to be Christian thought that is open to dialogue with the contemporary world. The God of the Gospel remains the God of the postmodernists, just as He was the God of Abraham, Augustine, and Thomas Aquinas. Our task is to search for new conceptual means of showing Him to be present in the heart of a culture in which the place of the once popular critique of religion has been increasingly occupied by agnosticism and indifference.

I. THE MAIN TRENDS OF POSTMODERNISM

The Names of Postmodernity

In the Postscript to *The Name of the Rose* Umberto Eco warned that the concept of postmodernism has become "a catch-all term" to which different people attach completely different meanings.[1] That liberty is exercised most often in the press, when the personal views of philosophizing journalists are raised to the level of the unquestionable achievements of postmodernism. Lovers of that practice very often take on the role of bards of egalitarianism and relativism, asserting that in the postmodern world everything is permitted, valid and equally good. Despite such assertions, Jean-François Lyotard, the author of *The Postmodern Condition*—a classic work of postmodernism—emphasizes repeatedly that the principle "everything goes" corresponds to the mentality of supermarket customers, but has nothing in common with the spirit of postmodernity. Similarly, Charles Jencks emphasizes that postmodern freedom can in no way be identified with the freedom which leads to relativism.

Umberto Eco said ironically that in some contemporary classifications even Homer would be considered a postmodernist. Without a trace of irony many contemporary authors count among the representatives of postmodernism John Paul II. This is done by authors as different from one another as Richard John Neuhaus,[2] Joseph Holland,[3] and Rocco Buttiglione.[4] The primary reason for such a classification is the fact that the Pope's work often includes a critique of contemporary culture along with a proposal for overcoming cultural models inspired by an uncritical fascination with the spirit of the Enlightenment. This shows the particular importance to contemporary postmodernism of conceptualizing the relationship between the individual human person and a pluralistic culture in which it is no longer possible to defend all of the ideas of

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1 Our translation. See Umberto Eco, *Postscript to The Name of the Rose*, trans. William Weaver (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1984), 65.

2 Richard J. Neuhaus, *The Catholic Moment: The Paradox of the Church in the Postmodern World* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987).

3 Joe Holland, "The Cultural Vision of Pope John Paul II: Toward a Conservative/Liberal Postmodern Dialogue," in VPT, 97 ff.

4 Cf. E. J. Dionne, "As Pope Confronts Dissenters," *New York Times*, 23 December 1986, A1 & A8.

the Enlightenment. The resultant analyses and anthropological and epistemological theses show that the various versions of postmodernism are of unequal value.

Condemning the rhetorical excesses of authors who would claim an exclusive right to speak about contemporary culture, Lyotard proclaims himself in favor of a "postmodernity worthy of respect;" he names among its precursors Aristotle, Pascal, and Kant. Despite those enthusiasts for liberal democracy who would be inclined to settle even questions of moral principle and of the value of the gravitational constant by popular vote, Lyotard—following Habermas[5]—recognizes the groundlessness of those contemporary attitudes in which consensus is absolutized without recognition of a sphere of values prior to any parliamentary vote or pragmatic considerations. In *The Postmodern Condition*, he writes:

> Consensus has become an outmoded and suspect value. But justice as a value is neither outmoded nor suspect. We must thus arrive at an idea and practice of justice that is not linked to that of consensus.[6]

It is a fundamental mistake to attempt to connect Lyotard's name with an ideology which proposes an anti-intellectual or half-educated view of the world in which popular slogans are valued more highly than critical thought. There are many controversial theses in the work of the author of *Libidinal Economy* which require a thoughtful critical response. They are not, however, controversial to the degree suggested by populist versions of postmodernism, in which each departure from classical models of rationality and meaning is treated as a manifestation of a postmodernist mentality. Therefore to avoid pointless polemics it will be necessary to look at the historical context of the proliferation of the new interpretative models considered characteristically postmodern.

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5 Habermas presented the classical version of his critique of postmodernism in 1980 in a speech given on the occasion of his reception of the Adorno Prize. See his "Modernity: An Unfinished Project" in Maurizio Passerin d'Entrèves and Seyla Benhabib, eds., *Habermas and the Unfinished Project of Modernity: Critical Essays on "The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity"* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1997), 38-55.

6 Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 66.

The Fourth Man of Postmodernity

In undertaking to periodize the various stages of culture, Gianfranco Morra presents a complex process of the socio-cultural transformations of human existence connected with the transition from the ancient model of man to Christian anthropology.[7] After the collapse of the medieval model came modernity, uniting the Renaissance with the Enlightenment. We now have a fourth, qualitatively new, model of existence for persons shaped by consumption and the profuse use of audiovisual media. In place of a civilization formed by Gutenberg's invention of the press comes the civilization of the image, which depends on the information revolution, whose special symbol is the Internet. In such a model, man plays his own aesthetic game with the environment. He does not simply reject religion, science, or philosophy, but he tries to understand them in a completely new way, as forms of linguistic games. While the question of God often is unburdened of atheistic ideologies, this is blurred semantically by considering both theism and atheism to be forms of our subjective play with the environment. An element of disappointment or nihilism is hidden in many forms of the contemporary critique of modernity[8] as manifest at various stages in the history of the past century. In 1917, Rudolf Pannowitz presented "postmodern" man as the primary character of the period after the First World War and tried to contrast him with representatives of earlier periods.[9]

Amid the disappointments brought by the twentieth century it is very easy to switch to an ideological apotheosis of ignorance and uncertainty. In the popular commentaries of those who praise postmodernity, this apotheosis takes the form of generalizations in which the simplicity of a one-dimensional vision is unable to express the richness of the cultural pluralism of the period. Thus it is affirmed definitively that "the time of certainties is irrevocably past, and the human being must now learn to live in a horizon of total absence of meaning, where everything is provisional and ephemeral."[10] Statements about a "total absence of meaning" remain merely rhetorical both for the practitioners of the exact

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7 Gianfranco Morra, *Il quarto uomo: postmodernità o crisi della modernità?* (Rome: Armando, 1996).

8 Ibid., 112. Cf. also G. Morra, "Dio nella filosofia post-moderna," *Studi cattolici* 38 (1994): 620–626.

9 Wolfgang Welsch, *Unsere postmoderne Moderne* (Weinheim: VCH, 1987), 40.

10 FeR, ¶91.

sciences who see deep meaning in the search for particular solutions and for the defenders of human rights who, after the experience of two totalitarianisms, recognize more clearly than ever before the importance of inviolable human rights. The intellectual view which those two groups share is far removed from that proposed by the supporters of postmodernism's "destructive critique of every certitude." This is a form of nihilism which rejects the Enlightenment trust in reason and science as well as its faith in the meaning of history and the perfectibility of social structures. As a consequence, we find that, "at the end of this century, one of our greatest threats is the temptation to despair"[11]

The roots of that despair go back to the tragedies of the Second World War and of the Holocaust. Beside those who—following Adorno—have asked whether after Auschwitz it is still possible to write metaphysics and poetry, some radical thinkers suggest that the Holocaust has a fundamental influence on the style of conducting theology and on our understanding of the relations between God and the world. Among the better-known radical proposals in this field is that of the Jewish philosopher, Hans Jonas, whose mother died at Auschwitz. In his famous lecture "The Concept of God after Auschwitz," presented in Tübingen in 1984, he introduced a strong exclusive disjunction, suggesting that God, who, despite His omnipotence, remained silent in the face of the suffering at Auschwitz, is either not the highest good or remains completely incomprehensible.[12] Experience of the tragedy of extermination affects both the evaluation of classical forms of rational discourse and the way of understanding the relation between an almighty God and those experiencing the drama of existence.

The pain of the victims of Auschwitz is by no means the last in the series of such dramas. To genocide, the symbol of which remain the barracks of Auschwitz and Kolyma, one must add the genocides of Cambodia and Rwanda. In contrast to great visions of the future, man can appear as a tragic being rather than as *animal rationale*. Certain thinkers try to express that tragic view with a scream, though this does not respect the classical principles of the syllogism. Among philosophical authorities, Friedrich Nietzsche once again appears as the great master, trying to philosophize even in the intervals between successive attacks of madness. The paroxysms of his cry are supposed to express the condition of a

11 Ibid.

12 Hans Jonas, *Der Gottesbegriff nach Auschwitz: Eine jüdische Stimme* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1987).

man more fully than did the insightful conclusions of the Aristotelians or the subtle distinctions of the Enlightenment rationalists. On that view, it is easy to blur the borders between the Academy and psychiatry. On the ruins of truth classically conceived, this would present a new, suggestive world of imagination in search of an alternative to what modernity had identified as progress.

Undoubtedly our experience of pain, disappointment, and the absurd also brings an important truth about man and often, the authenticity of the human drama is clearly heard in the postmodernist expression of that pain. But a problem appears when one attempts to introduce a rhetoric of liberation in order to abandon the classical conception of truth in the context of an apologetic of freedom. The fourth man of postmodernity demands careful anthropological elaboration. Attempts to express the complex truth about the nature of man by means of simple slogans have often been made in the course of the history of ideas. Examples of such attempts include both Feuerbach's declarations that man is what he eats and the mechanistic suggestions of the eighteenth-century French encyclopedists, who reduced the richness of human existence to the structure of machines. At present, the rhetoric of the encyclopedists is much closer to the postmodernist tradition than is the mathematical precision of Euler and d'Alembert. Wolfgang Welsch expresses the essence of populistic postmodernism in the phrase: "many Diderots, few d'Alemberts"[13]

Amitai Etzioni introduced the concept of a postmodern society into sociology in 1968.[14] He notes that the end of the Second World War in 1945 opened the period of postmodernity, in which an active society has a chance to be no longer a society of slaves, but rather the master of the instruments which it itself creates. Such a conception would be close to Christianity in its search for the possibility of overcoming the instrumental treatment of the human person. An eschatological motif connected to declarations both about the death of the human subject and about the end of history, as well as a personalism, often appears on the horizon of the struggles of the fourth man. Entropology becomes the sad coronation of anthropology as the development of humanity moves inexorably towards a state of maximal entropy and fundamental human values lose their power to create culture.

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13 Welsch, 85.

14 Amitai Etzioni, *The Active Society: A Theory of Societal and Political Process* (New York: Free Press, 1968).

Postmodernity leads logically to an experience of history accomplished—to a posthistory.

This is given various forms by various representatives of postmodernism. Its best-known variant is supposed to be the result of the fact that, at the current stage of history, one can no longer expect important innovations. Historical possibilities are exhausted; there is no need for new ideas, since social life has become subjected to the principles of liberal democracy. Such a formulation, developed by Francis Fukuyama,[15] is challenged by Samuel P. Huntington in his *The Clash of Civilizations*.[16] He considered it parochialism to treat structures and institutions characteristic of the West as universal without taking into consideration that during the same time period different civilizations can experience completely different problems. Encounters between such civilizations can be the cause of pointless arguments about the advent of posthistory. The problem consists in representatives of the West thinking strongly in terms of the present forms of globalization that they do not notice that events in China, Russia, or the Muslim nations can have decisive influence on the future fate of the world.

The Huntington–Fukuyama debate shows the possibility of rational discussion on the important threads of postmodernity. That view was trivialized by Lacanian psychoanalysts and commentators on the thought of Nietzsche, once the most prominent representatives of postmodernism. Their monologic style discouraged an interest in postmodernism among those who valued the tradition of classical philosophy. Now, however, one already sees that the question of the condition of the fourth man of postmodernity is not limited to those who would like to replace rational discourse with the monologico-authoritarian style of the guru. Current cultural transformations, by bringing so many new questions and new challenges, force inexorably the need for reflection on the fundamentally changed condition of man. In order not to expect univocal answers to the questions posed, it is necessary to distinguish in postmodernism the various traditions and differences which fundamentally influence the proposed resolutions of these problems.

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15 Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York: Free Press, 1992).

16 *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of the World Order* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996).

The Multiplicity of Postmodernisms

Taking into consideration both substantive opinions and the methodology by which conclusions are justified in the many deeply differing currents of postmodernism, it is common to distinguish the following basic varieties:[17]

1. French postmodernism, under the dominating influence of the deconstructionism of Jacques Derrida. Its classical representatives are Jean-François Lyotard, Michel Foucault, and Gilles Deleuze.
2. American postmodernism, in which either elements of pragmatism (Richard Rorty) or attempts to work out more traditional philosophical categories predominate (David Griffin, John Cobb[18]).
3. Christian postmodernism, which takes into account the justified critique of the ideology of the Enlightenment and combines it with a positive formulation of the relation of Christianity to contemporary cultural challenges (Peter Koslowksi,[19] Catherine Pickstock, Graham Ward).
4. Populist (ideological) postmodernism, which, without connection to one clearly defined interpretive tradition, critiques the Socratic-Enlightenment tradition in ways that are internally incoherent and entangled in inconsistencies inspired by an antipathy for rationality as classically understood.

Such a classification is not accepted even by the authors it mentions. Jacques Derrida agrees that, among Francophone authors, Lyotard should be considered to be a postmodernist, but thinks it unlikely that, among the Americans, Rorty would not protest

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17 Cf. Pierre Gisel and Patrick Evrard, eds., *La Théologie en postmodernité* (Geneva: Labor et fides, 1996).

18 See John Cobb, "Two Types of Postmodernism: Deconstruction and Process," *Theology Today* 47 (1990): 149–158.

19 Cf., for example, Peter Koslowski, Robert Spaemann, and Reinhard Löw, *Moderne oder Postmoderne? Zur Signatur des gegenwärtigen Zeitalters* (Weinheim: VCH, 1986); J. Breech, *Jesus and Postmodernism* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989); P. Koslowski, ed., *Europa jutra* (Lublin: Wydawnictwo Katolickiego Universytetu Lubelskiego, 1984); P. Koslowski, "Christliche Gnosis und Philosophie unter Bedingungen der Postmoderne," in *Philosophie und Religion* (Hanover: Bernhard, 1989), 23–47.

against such a classification. Nevertheless, Derrida protests against connecting to that trend both his own work and that of Foucault and Deleuze. He asserts:

> I am not a postmodernist and feel a certain aloofness towards the term. I am, therefore, greatly disturbed by attempts to pigeon-hole not only myself but also others, particularly Frenchmen. … Postmodernism, the philosophy of Lyotard, is based on the affirmation that … the time of grand narratives has ended, the process of emancipation has ended, the period of revolution has ended. I still believe in revolution.[20]

Not all authors consider that one's attitude towards revolution is a sufficient criterion for deciding whether someone is a postmodernist. Much more popular is a classification in which various versions of postmodernism are distinguished on the basis of substantive differences in the views of their representatives. Yet giving greater weight to the self-classification of the postmodernists can lead to grotesque consequences, as when Rorty refers to Leszek Kołakowski a Catholic thinker.[21]

The critique directed at postmodernism most often concerns its French variety. The work of Derrida in particular, combining as it does a hermetic language with an extreme lack of clarity in formulation, faces a variety of charges which cannot be applied to representatives of other forms of postmodernism. Such works inspire a special style of "textualist" research in which scholars, adhering to Husserlian phenomenology, leave aside the historical and psychological aspects of statements and accept a simple identification of the spoken and the written word. Among the representatives of that approach are Jacques Lacan, Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, Philippe Sollers, Roland Barthes, and Tzvetan Todorov. Despite popular opinion, according to which the language of Derrida is not susceptible to criticism, there developed, outside of postmodernist circles, a penetrating analysis of the substantive views of the author of *Writing and Difference*.[22] We

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20 Jacques Derrida, "Nie jestem postmodernistą," in Bronisław Wildstein, *Profile wieku* (Warsaw: Politeja, 2000), 162 ff.

21 Richard Rorty, "Filozofia pasożytuje na wyobraźni poetyckiej," ibid., 155.

22 Trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978).

find such an analysis, for example, in the works of Walter J. Ong.[23] While Foucault, in his "archaeology of knowledge," places greater emphasis on the application of contemporary categories than on the reconstruction of the historical facts in their "archaeological" structure, Ong concentrates his attention on the influence which historical cultural causes have on the content of our statements. Just as ordinary modes of communication influence our modes of thought, transformations in communications technology (Internet, fax, television) radically change our evaluations and our view of the world. Cultural transformations transformed orality into textuality when the discovery of the press lowered the prestige of institutions in which the giving of speeches and the recitation of poetry were practiced.[24] The consequences of this change were: a lessened interest in Latin and a turn away from the classics towards the contemporary, along with an increased appreciation for national languages, even in academic institutions.

Despite the thematic connection to the fundamental problems considered by contemporary postmodernism, and despite clear references to the work of Derrida, in his lectures on the theory of literature Ong constantly emphasizes that in our search for truth we must strive to achieve an integral account. This should provide an harmonious juxtaposition of partial accounts and finally turn out to be a "path to God," showing that the whole world is Divine. There is no objective reason to treat the conclusions drawn by Derrida and Deleuze as the final word on controversial problems; in the discussions of the essence of a text, one must weigh the arguments, not the authorities. There is also no reason to depart from classical epistemology and rational methodological distinctions and to absolutize the type of discourse conducted among the new authorities, a type characteristic of American postmodernism.

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23 Walter J. Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* (New York: Methuen, 1982), 165–171; idem, *The Barbarian Within, And Other Fugitive Essays and Studies* (New York: Macmillan, 1962), 271; idem, *The Presence of the Word: Some Prolegomena for Cultural and Religious History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967).

24 Cf. Józef Japola, *Tekst czy głos?: Waltera J. Onga antropologia literatury* (Lublin: Wydawnictwo Katolickiego Universytetu Lubelskiego, 1998), 61–66.

Constructive Postmodernism

In the classification of David R. Griffin,[25] the distinction between deconstructive postmodernism (also called eliminative postmodernism or ultramodernism) and constructive postmodernism is of fundamental importance. The last is sometimes called revisionary postmodernism,[26] since it is a radical departure from the tradition of Derrida and Lyotard, which tried to eliminate the concepts of God, soul, meaning, truth, objective values, and universal principles from the world of philosophy. In the terminology proposed by Mark C. Taylor, that tradition is called simply affirming nihilism.[27]

Constructive postmodernism tries to overcome modernity's objective lack of an intellectual inheritance, recognizing a meaning for life and history and accepting beliefs about freedom, truth, and the hierarchy of values as acknowledged in a hidden way in the conduct of our affairs.[28] It seeks its intellectual inspiration in the methodological criticism of Karl R. Popper or in the process philosophy of Alfred North Whitehead. These authors must be considered since deconstructive postmodernism's critique of modernity replaces modernity's oversimplifications with a new type of oversimplification which in turn must be subjected to critique.[29] It attempts to soften that last critique, questioning both the classical conception of truth and the traditional principles of epistemology. In radical formulations, an attempt is made to present even extreme nihilism as an achievement particularly close to the experiences of "Christian selflessness, Jewish exile, and Buddhist emptiness"[30] based on a "horror of modernity." The pragmatic way of healing those anxieties is supposed to be based on the elimination of those values and truths which traditionally evoke metaphysical horror. Opposing such a pragmatic approach, David R. Griffin emphasizes:

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25 David Ray Griffin, "Introduction: Varieties of Postmodern Theology," in VPT, 1.

26 Ibid., "Introduction to SUNY Series in Constructive Posmodern Thought," xii.

27 Mark C. Taylor, *Erring: A Postmodern A/Theology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 140.

28 D. R. Griffin, "Postmodern Theology and A/Theology: A Response to Mark C. Taylor," in VPT, 40.

29 Ibid., 41.

30 Mark C. Taylor, "Masking: Domino Effect," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 54 (1986): 3: 554.

> A horrible meaning cannot be replaced by a vacuum of meaning, but only by a better meaning. A horrible Holy One cannot be replaced by a decentered, disenchanted universe, but only by a better intuition of its Holy Center.[31]

It would be an oversimplification to identify the work of American authors with the tradition of constructive postmodernism. The work of Rorty, despite its connections with the pragmatism of Dewey and James, taken as a whole remains significantly more nihilistic than works influenced by Derrida and Deleuze. Both those French authors and Rorty are counted by Calvin O. Schrag as among the "antireason postmodernists."[32] That is important inasmuch as, at the foundation of distinct intellectual and cultural traditions, one finds formulations dominated by pessimism, negation, a break with the tradition of the Enlightenment, a feeling of disintegration, emptiness, absence of moral categories, and in extreme cases a feeling of the absurd which transforms itself into despair. Authors who do not want to suggest, in the very name of the trend, its irrationalist sympathies, following Pauline M. Rosenau, call that style of philosophy skeptical postmodernism[33] or, more often, deconstructive postmodernism.[34] Despite the fact that that trend contains many highly controversial theses about its own substantive importance, the version most influential in forming public opinion is populist postmodernism. In extreme cases, this combines a feuilletonistic potpourri with a New Age metaphysics, taken as the religion of postmodernity.[35]

In his excellent study *Our Postmodern Modernity*, Wolfgang Welsch gives a particularly critical evaluation to the populist version of the postmodern as a paraintellectual substitute for philosophy. He calls it "feuilletonistic postmodernism" in order to emphasize that it is both "intolerable and unproductive."

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31 David Ray Griffin, "Postmodern Theology," 52.

32 Calvin O. Schrag, "Rationality between Modernity and Postmodernity," in Stephen K. White, ed., *Life-world and Politics: Between Modernity and Postmodernity* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1989), 86.

33 Pauline M. Rosenau, *Postmodernism and Social Science* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 9.

34 Zuzana Parusnikova, "Is a Postmodern Philosophy of Science Possible?" *Studies in History and Philosophy of Science* 23 (1992): 1: 36.

35 Griffin, "Introduction to SUNY Series," xii.

Perennial Philosophy in the Light of Postmodernism

The common trait of the various versions of postmodernism is the fragility and uncertainty of many truths which earlier generations thought to be untouchable. We can repeat, following Anthony Giddens, that the essence of postmodernity is expressed in our acknowledgment of the uncertainty of recognized truths.[36] That approach stands in sharp opposition to the Enlightenment's characteristic faith in the cognitive possibilities of human reason and in the perfection of scientific knowledge. Different versions of postmodernism have emphasized, though to varying degrees, that we live in a secularized society in which the elimination of God's presence in the culture has brought both the so-called death of God and a departure from Enlightenment models of emancipation. Without questioning the presence of radically new phenomena in the field of contemporary culture, it must be noted that many of the phenomena mentioned as characteristic of postmodernity appeared already in the nineteenth century.

Thomas Carlyle described the antireligious mood of that period, comparing the Middle Ages with the Age of Steam and Magnetism. He wrote:

> We have quietly closed our eyes to the eternal Substance of things and opened them only to the Shews and Shams of things.… There is no longer any God for us! God's laws are become a Greatest-Happiness Principle, a Parliamentary Expediency:… There is no religion, there is no God; man has lost his soul, and vainly seeks anti-septic salt.[37]

The 24-year-old Friedrich Engels copied out those very lines of Carlyle in 1844. The same concerns characterized the young A. C. Swinburne (1837–1909) when he formulated his provocative theses about the superiority of John Stuart Mill over the Bible and proposed that the *Te Deum laudamus* be immediately replaced with a *Te hominem laudamus*.[38] This ideological perspective was articulated by Wilhelm Liebknecht, founder of the First

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36 Anthony Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990), 46–49.

37 Thomas Carlyle, *Past and Present* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1965), Book III, i, 139–140.

38 Cecil Y. Lang, ed., *The Swinburne Letters* (New York: AMS Press, 1972), II: 312.

International and the father of Karl Liebknecht, before the casket of Marx when he informed those in attendance that God was dead but that Karl Marx is immortal.[39]

There is a poetic expression of the declaration of the death of God in a work of Thomas Hardy published in 1910, in which he imagines the funeral of the Lord God.[40] In his lines one does not find that aggression which is so striking in the texts of Nietzsche, but only a view of God as the projection of human expectations and dreams. That does not alter the fact that on some Sundays, Hardy, who lived in Cambridge, visited the church three times a day, marveling in the beauty of the music and song or seeking spiritual consolation in its distinctive silences. One may speak here of the aestheticization of religious experience: objectively God does not exist, but at the level of cultural behavior we act as though he did. Contemporary postmodernism has a different view: God disappears from our culture, as does the aesthetic tradition which created the natural context for an encounter with God. The elementary question, however, arises: is it possible to imagine a human existence deprived of objective reference to Divine transcendence and to openness to the reality of grace in the changed aesthetic and in a culture which has undergone very deep transformations?

The postmodernist fascination with what is current goes along with a depreciation both of reference to historical tradition and of orientation to eschatology. This is not the classical "Linger a while, o beautiful moment so fair,"[41] since in it despair, the absurd, or mere illusion often appear in place of beauty. Suppression of the lingering of the moment is also pointless since the structure of the world forces on us a fascination with the transitory, the passing and the non-lingering, such that it would be an illusion to search for forms which would guarantee the lastingness of our sensations. Concentration of attention on the fragile "here and now" creates a distance both from the intellectual perspective characteristic of the so-called perennial philosophy and from universal categories by which it would be possible to overcome the peculiarities of local conditioning in a pluralistic culture.

There are reasons to think that the contemporary multiplicity of postmodernisms indicates a transitional state and that only the future will bring the crystallization of a predominant trend of thought. Even the prefix "post-" in statements about

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39 Robert Payne, *Marx* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1968), 503.

40 A. N. Wilson, *God's Funeral: A Biography of Faith and Doubt in Western Civilization* (New York: Ballantine, 1999), 3.

41 J. W. Goethe, *Faust*, 1609 ff.

postmodernity and its counterparts, defining the essence of the new ideas by their relation to the past, affirms those assumptions. Participation in discussions of the cultural problems of postmodernity remains the task of the representatives of the perennial philosophy. The encyclical *Fides et Ratio* points us in the same direction, considering the deep differences between the first versions of postmodernism at the level of aesthetics, of the social sciences and of technology, and its later expression in the field of philosophy.[42]

Rather than adopting an easy rejection of postmodernism, we must distinguish its different versions and recognize the varying value of its proposals. Seeing in it evidence of the cultural transformations of the age, we must get to the essence of those transformations and, in the style of the Apostle to the Gentiles, become "all things to all men" (1 Corinthians 9: 22), in order to share the Gospel, even in places where the methods applied thus far have failed. The evolution of many philosophical systems in the twentieth century allows us to maintain a marked optimism.

It should be noted that when Freudian psychoanalysis first appeared some commentators saw in it a great danger both to a religious view of the world and to feelings about human dignity. Yet now one meets religious psychoanalysts who, making selective use of Freud, try to help their patients find faith in themselves and a feeling of dignity. This suggests that a consideration of the positive role of Freud in an analysis of subconscious processes does not imply acceptance either of the anthropology which it suggests or of its critique of religion. Indeed some American psychoanalysts have even tried to interpret the origin of atheism by appeal to subconscious processes.

A similar evolution of views can be seen by considering the deep transformations in French existentialism. Its extreme versions, declaring the primacy of the absurd and the necessity of abandoning classical philosophy, was for a while identified with nihilism and an end to any humanism. The later work of Albert Camus and Gabriel Marcel provided, however, a completely different model of existentialist philosophy. Clearly, philosophy—conducted as the rational juxtaposition of substantive arguments—cannot be reduced to the level of commentary on the texts of masters recognized as unchallengeable gurus. One can see such a critique among the representatives of contemporary postmodernism, who differ principally in the formulation of their fundamental theses. Thus the problem comes down to whether to reduce philosophical discussion

42 FeR, ¶91.

to the journalistic level, at which postmodernism looks like an anti-intellectual collection of slogans, or whether to search for forms combining systematic criticism with consideration of the new problems which evidence the deep perplexities of our age.

II. THE DEATH OF GOD OR THE RETURN OF POLYTHEISM?

Between the Dance and the Death of God

The iconoclastic pronouncements of Friedrich Nietzsche are a kind of fundamental text in the theological thought of postmodernism. Among these texts are both the declaration from *Thus Spake Zarathustra* that one can believe only in a God who can dance and the assertion that all the gods are already dead. This creates a new view of life for the superman—"*Dead are all the Gods: now we want the Superman to live."*[1] From the perspective of time it turns out that there must also be a supplementary declaration about the death of man: "Man is dead." Unexpectedly for the Nietzschean prognosis, however, in the background of all those processes one notes a renaissance of polytheism[2] as a new form of the cult of the contemporary idols. This appears when certain relative values begin to be treated as absolute in the spheres dominated by relativism, which gives them a disproportionately large prominence or subordinates to them all other values. That theme is taken up by the German scholar of postmodernity, Odo Marquard. He considers the declaration about the death of God to be the characteristic feature of the intellectual climate of our time. Just as Greek civilization, at a certain stage of its development, was fascinated by skepticism, and the Middle Ages discovered nominalism—the fascination of our own time turns out to be "weak thought,"[3] in which the great theses about God, truth, the meaning of history, and human dignity disappear.[4] These ideas are regarded as myths which have exhausted their culture-creating function. In their place appear the little narratives of weak thought. They embrace only a small segment of human existence and exclude categorically the appearance of a Biblical God of meaning and history who would say to man: I am your only history; Thou shalt not have another history besides me.

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1 Friedrich W. Nietzsche, *Thus Spake Zarathustra* 22, 3.

2 Cf. Odo Marquard, *In Defense of the Accidental: Philosophical Studies* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991).

3 The term was introduced in Gianni Vattimo, *The Transparent Society*, trans. David Webb (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992).

4 Odo Marquard, "In Praise of Polytheism (On Monomythical and Polymythical Thinking)," in *Farewell to Matters of Principle: Philosophical Studies* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 87–110.

The consequence of the programmatic rejection of the grand intellectual tradition is a phenomenon which Herling-Grudziński has called "the circus of a civilization which has lost faith in itself and has sold itself for trifles"[5] and was enthusiastically accepted by the hosts of slaves of the ideology of liberation. In place of the pathos of great effort, however, it is possible to be content with mediocrity and to feel comfortable in a community which does not support ambitious dreams of greatness. Great ideals turn out to be too great in relation to realistic possibilities for beings who have come to recognize mediocrity as their natural environment. On that view, an entire life can be regarded as personal happening and the ironic fool then fulfills the function of both teacher and chaplain. The sparkling style of the programmatic ironist and a sense of humor which does not tax one's brain cells or impose any moral obligations are easy to accept. Their cultural consequence is the axiological and intellectual emptiness of a civilization from which the ideals that formed the models of thought and moral evaluation from the time of the Pre-Socratics are removed.

On that view, even Prometheus turns out to be too great for contemporary expectations, since he brings ideas of liberation and progress which were not realized in the Enlightenment narrative about the emancipatory development of man. What is of interest to the period of pluralism turns out to be polytheism. This brings the climate of the supermarket and allows one to make a selection even at the level of one's theological interests. Hermeneutic measures make it possible to subordinate our attitudes towards life to the cult of the Greek idols: God is dead, but the consequence of that death is not a proclamation of atheism, but a renaissance of the idols. In order to justify the unexpected invasion of polytheism, it is possible to appeal even to the classical works of Max Weber[6] and Giuseppe Rensi.[7]

The rehabilitation of polytheism presented by Marquard finds its intellectual roots in Hans Blumenberg's theory of myth, especially in his conception of the *kenosis* of the myth of God.[8] For the author of *Work on Myth*, myth is above all a manifestation of the human dilemma of existential finitude and the infinitude of the imagination. History is the graveyard of myths, which, at various stages of human development,

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5 Gustaw Herling-Grudziński, *Godzina cieni: Eseje* (Cracow: Znak, 1991), 111.

6 See the question of "the absolute polytheism of values" in Max Weber, "The Meaning of Ethical Neutrality in Sociology and Economics," in *The Methodology of the Social Sciences*, ed. and trans. E.A. Shils and H.A. Finch (Glencoe, Illinois: Free Press, 1949), 17.

7 Giuseppe Rensi, *Critica della morale* (Catania: Etna, 1935).

8 Hans Blumenberg, *Work on Myth* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1985).

eased the pain of existence and inspired the transformation of the world. After the death of the myth of God, some wanted to fill the empty place with the myth of man or even of Superman. The death of God created complete liberty of movement for all possible variants of human development. The path so opened turned out, however, to be empty. Blumenberg makes reference to the extremely pessimistic theses of Emil Cioran, who—as a kind of new Nietzsche—maintains that the historic destiny of man is to take the idea of God to its ultimate limit, i.e., to the assertion that God is no longer necessary for our civilization.[9] On that view, the queen of the sciences turns out to be thanatology. God is dead; man is dying; meaning is vanishing; theodicy, metaphysics, and history have reached their ultimate limit. What remains for us is a return to a little mythology in which weak thought directs our attention to seasonal idols.[10] While Nietzsche announced the death of God with enthusiasm as a great achievement, his present followers are able only to choose between skepticism, the absurd, and despair.

Despair and the feeling of the absurd were hidden in the existential situation of Nietzsche: note his conception of the Superman, who attained greatness thanks to the death of God. The logic of his conclusions combines literary glibness, expressive rhetoric, and hidden despair. Struggling with mental illness, the author of *The Gay Science* declared in a letter to a friend dated10 December 1888 that the translation of his *Antichrist* could sell millions of copies in any language. He assured his friend:

> My book is like a volcano. From the literature to date one has no idea what is said there or how the deepest secrets of human nature suddenly arise there with such dreadful clarity.[11]

As a completion of this unsent letter, he left behind a set of notecards signed, "Dionysus," "Ruler of the World," "Caesar," and even "The Crucified." Perhaps by the logic of pain, where he had earlier made clear distinctions between himself and the Crucified, such distinctions lost their sharpness in the hour of suffering. Perhaps the drama of mental illness introduced an additional split in his tragic personality.

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9 Ibid., *Matthäuspassion* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1988).

10 Gianni Vattimo, *Al di là del soggetto: Nietzsche, Heidegger e l'ermeneutica* (Milano: Feltrinelli, 1981).

11 Letter to Georg Brandes, quoted in Anacleto Verecchia, *Zarathustras Ende: Die Katastrophe Nietzsches in Turin*, trans. Peter Pawlowsky (Böhlau: Vienna, 1986), 217.

Before Nietzsche was finally confined at the mental hospital in Jena, it was necessary to resort to a trick to get him off his train. They convinced him that he was a prince traveling *incognito* who had to pass silently through the crowd and get into a waiting carriage. Such dramatic situations may bring him particularly close to our generation with its crisis of identity and his oscillation between the drama of mental illness and the pose of a disguised prince. On the pages of *Ecce Homo*, generations of readers have tried to find hope for a more beautiful life in the opposition of Christ to Dionysus. Dionysus seems to them to be the idol of rebirth, an intoxication which protects them from despair and destruction. The deconstruction of the meaning traditionally presented by Christianity is essentially an invitation to the Dionysian dance.

Pain and the passion of Nietzsche's rhetoric speaks to many circles which proclaim the slogans of postmodernism. Even Richard Rorty, whose skeptical pragmatism seems to be a contradiction of the philosophical style of *Ecce Homo*, is affected by a fascination with the vision of a secularized world, in which God does not appear in human culture. This particularly excites Rorty, who takes Nietzschean metaphors to extremes, explaining:

> To say, with Nietzsche, that God is dead, is to say that we serve no higher purposes. The Nietzschean substitution of self-creation for discovery substitutes a picture of the hungry generations treading each other down for a picture of humanity approaching closer and closer to the light. A culture in which Nietzschean metaphors were literalized would be one which took for granted that philosophical problems are as temporary as poetic problems, that there are no problems which bind the generations together into a single natural kind called "humanity."[12]

Not all contemporary supporters of Nietzsche's thought try as hard as does Rorty to spell out the particular consequences of the philosophy of the Superman: the lack of solidarity in the so-called human family, the impermanence and fragility of all values and truths, the lack of higher goals which would give meaning and greatness to our struggles with life. The death of meaning and of the beauty of human existence appear on this view as the natural consequence of the death of God. Despite noble declarations, the natural environment of the Superman seems to be despair on the road of lost values.

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12 Rorty, CIS, 20.

Overcoming Despair

Writing about the cultural dangers of the contemporary world, John Paul II recognized the temptation to despair among its greatest.[13] We can relate this statement of the Pope to various shades of despair, all of which are reactions to the cultural transformations of our time. One finds in them disappointment in the systems which were fascinated with the vision of the Superman and of heaven on earth; there is the phenomenon of "burnt out human beings" who cannot overcome the emptiness of life; there is the crisis of the family and escape into the world of narcotic dreams. The roots of that despair go back to the tragedy of the Second World War and the Holocaust. Tragic man, living through his pain in a world in which an incomprehensible God seems to remain silent, seeks new forms for the expression of his faith.

In order to understand the intentions of those who, in the depths of their experienced pain, seek new forms of expression of their spirit, we must make ourselves aware that the world does not seem to everyone to be an orderly, rational and harmonious reality. For many people, it is a tragic composition in which pain and despair predominate. One can escape from despair into the feelings of the moment: irony or bewilderment. Giving expression to that attitude, E. M. Cioran wrote in his *Notebooks:* "If only I had the courage to howl for a quarter of an hour every day, then I would be perfectly normal."[14] From programmatic howling one can also very easily produce a stylized kitsch in which preoccupation with tragedy is as artificial as are some romantic fascinations with nature. That kitsch is, however, also an important expression of loss and pain, to which a Christian may not be indifferent—all the more when the dancing Dionysus is offered as a way of overcoming pain.

Dancing Dionysus

Michel Maffesoli developed the Dionysian theme in the context of postmodernist weak thought.[15] His Dionysus is no longer a Promethean god or Superman, but an idol of bewildered beings who have lost their subjectivity. He rejected the style of being characteristic of the bourgeois models of modernity. The tribal community is nearer to

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13 FeR, ¶91.

14 E. M. Cioran, *Cahiers 1957–1962* (Paris: Gallimard, 1997).

15 Michel Maffesoli, *The Shadow of Dionysus: A Contribution to the Sociology of the Orgy* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993); idem, *The Time of the Tribes: The Decline of Individualism in Mass Society* (Thousand Oaks, California: Sage, 1996).

him than is the shelter of the family; the intoxication of the orgy than cold calculation. Artistic disorder, aversion to schemata, the play of appearances, and bewilderment by the current moment demarcate the new horizon of his existence. In place of the society of consumption which characterizes modernity there appears a qualitatively new kind of postmodernist consumption of previous models. What could possibly be consumed has already been consumed and those consumers retain only the feeling of satiety with life and the experience of axiological emptiness. New social archetypes make many former questions pointless and lead to a world of new social conventions. Those conventions tell us to avoid "reactionary" attitudes and questions about the causes of the revolt against technology, just as we avoided, as badly formulated, questions about why a rose is a rose. One must accept the inevitable structure of the world also in that which is painful. It is to the intensity of sensations that one must look to counteract the easy temptation to escape into the absurd or into despair.

Christianity led to a perspective on life in which historical progress and industrial productivity were valued. Dionysus invites us to the feast of life, in which social polyphony is achieved thanks to new types of bonds generated by values in a hierarchy in which wine and sex become the primary symbols. In place of the God of the Bible who tells us to strive for perfection, Maffesoli proposes a god of the theater combining a sense of the drama of life with escape into the world of bewilderment and excitement. The place of the linear time of the Bible, to which the Enlightenment gave a laicized form, is taken by a cyclical time close to the visions of Nietzsche from the beginning of his illness. This allows one constantly to begin anew; it does not crush with the logic of inevitable development, but gives potential nomads a chance to wander both in space and in time. *Logos* and *mythos*, joined together, lead to a realm of surprising paradoxes, the product of which is an original variant of tragic humanism.[16]

Fits of successive excitement and disappointment can be easier to bear, knowing that the future is a walk along a spiral path and that after successive waves of despair will come liberating moments of forgetfulness and excitement. Julian Tuwim, in his poem "Socrates Dancing"[17] gave expression to his fascination with the philosopher who, instead of weighing moral reasons, light-heartedly dances in the streets of Athens. Dionysus' dance looks even more attractive especially to those who do not yet have any other forms of escape from despair and

16 Ibid., *Du nomadisme: vagabondages initiatiques* (Paris: Livre de poche, 1997).

17 Julian Tuwim, *The Dancing Socrates and Other Poem*, trans. Adam Gillons (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1968).

who in the intoxication of the dance would like to carry out a radical deconstruction of the pain of life. Despite terminological appearances, the dancing Dionysus appears on that view as a projection of the longing for a world free from pain and suffering. Authors who trust in the logic of classical discourse are engaged in the Dionysian analysis of postmodernism, in the question of the relation between God and suffering.[18] In answer to their questions, it is possible to formulate from various perspectives the issue of the agreement between the Dionysian tradition and the Christianity of the Gospels. On the one hand, there is no reason for Nietzsche to have had a monopoly on the formulation of the mutual relations between these two trends. On the other hand, the search for new solutions cannot be reduced to the simple postulate: "Baptize Dionysus." The Dionysian theme, so powerfully emphasized in the works of the representatives of contemporary postmodernism, tells us, however, to search for a critical reinterpretation of the late nineteenth-century's unjustifiably and radically oversimplified opposition between Christ and Dionysus.

Christ and Dionysus

The Dionysian model of life was traditionally understood in opposition to Apollonian models of life, in which harmony, rationality and consistency play the main roles. There are no objective reasons for identifying Christianity exclusively with the Apollonian model. The logic of the death and resurrection of Christ is not the logic of Greek syllogisms, whose validity would have been recognized by the participants in the meeting with St. Paul on the Areopagus. Jesus presented as the suffering "servant of Yahweh" in a drama of extreme humiliation in no way calls to mind the Hellenistic Apollo dazzling in beauty and power. In the richness of the various traditions of Christianity, one can find such different models as the monastic community, in which spiritual ties are valued more highly than those of family, and the desert life in which solitude is the fundamental setting of the dialogue between man and God. So, it seems reasonable to expect that there might also be some kind of version of a postmodernist poetics of life that would be consonant with Christian spirituality.

The search for such a poetics is inspired by the element of incompleteness, so important to Christian spirituality, which manifests itself in the fact that the Holy Spirit constantly guides the faithful to the fullness of truth (John 16: 13). That truth, however, never appears in a

18 Cf. Gaspare Mura, "Il 'dolore' di Dio" in Gaspare Mura and Paolo Miccoli, eds., *Una "rilettura" di Dio nella cultura contemporanea* (Rome: Città Nuova, 1995), 157–191.

complete and closed system of propositions. The Gospels more than once show situations which inspired both the great mystics and the creators of the so-called negative theology to introduce the category of negation in order to approximate those factors of Divine being which lie beyond the reach of reason. One must see the maturity of the early Church not in the Apostle's power of rational speculation, but in their openness to the influence of the Holy Spirit which leads to a radically new view of life. The Divine influence on the style and radicalism of the first Christians was so strong that outside observers were inclined to accuse them of Dionysian tendencies when on the day of the Descent of the Holy Spirit they said: "They are filled with new wine" (Acts 2: 13). They attempted to describe the deepest religious experiences, accessible to mystics, in terms of intoxication with God. St. Thomas Aquinas was known both for his rational inquiry and for his mystical ecstasies, though he valued the latter more highly. Rational criteria must play a role in the evaluation of authenticity. Yet the enlivening presence of the Holy Spirit in the Church is not exhausted at the level of rational evaluation. It is manifest also in: the fascination and joy of life, openness to what is new, and the ability to overcome inertia, boredom, and a peculiar heaviness of being.

Mystical Lightness of Spirit

In its first associations, Dionysian models of life bring to mind the style of the characters in the stories of Milan Kundera. Where Kundera's ideas of an unbearable lightness of being irritate, there can be a significantly deeper Christian category of a mystical lightness of spirit. Its manifestations are: optimism, hope, and trust experienced among life's cares and failures if we are only able to open our hearts to the action of the grace of the Holy Spirit and to overcome all that was only a matter of common-sense habit. The evangelical example of such an attitude is the Prodigal Son, who was able to return to his father's house even amid the extreme disappointments and humiliations of life. His older brother, trapped in the logic of rational behavior, longs for a festival robe, a ring, and a feast in his honor (Luke 15: 11–32). Both the logic of the loving father and the drama of the lost younger son lead us into a world whose essence cannot be expressed by means of classical syllogisms and the traditional concept of justice. The paradoxes of that world appear often in the Gospels. They can be seen in the Sermon on the Mount and in the oppositions which make us aware that the first can be last and the last, first. They are manifest in the surprising logic of faith, in which children turn out to be more important than the learned, and public sinners precede the just on the road leading to the Kingdom of God. Their Old Testament expression was: David dancing before the

Ark of the Lord (2 Samuel 6: 5) and the lover in the Song of Songs hurrying to her Lover, in a mood combining the joy of life with sensitivity for the poetic dimension of our acts.

The Logic of Divine Paradoxes

The numerous paradoxes shown on the pages of the Gospel are very close to the postmodernist view of the world. As an example, it suffices to point to Jesus' assertion that His yoke is easy and His burden light (Matthew 11: 30). Between each noun and its adjectival modifier, there appears a tension connected with a deep difference in content. Meanwhile in the view of the evangelical logic of faith, that which human beings take as opposed turns out to be logically consistent. For "those who wanted to save their lives lose them, and those who decided to lay down their lives find them" (Matthew 16: 25). The logic of paradoxes hidden in the statements about the easy yoke and the light burden does not lead to the unbearable lightness of being valued by Kundera's characters, who seek that lightness by giving up values which play a fundamental role in the Christian view of the world. It may be possible to speak in a certain sense about the lightness of a being freed from the categories of moral responsibility, of a feeling of spiritual solidarity with one's neighbors, or of the imperative of fidelity to previously made choices of values. In Christianity, however, an experience of lightness of heart accompanies the discovery of the fascinating truth about the freedom of the children of God, namely that freedom by no means leads to an egoistic concentration of attention on oneself, but a world of deep paradoxes which cause us to find ourselves by offering ourselves as a gift to others.

The freedom-bearing gifts of the Holy Spirit find their completion in the attitude towards life in which we offer our selves as gifts. The category of personal gift overcomes the traditional tension between individualism and collectivism. Those who were not able to offer their time and effort altruistically to others impoverished the potential richness of human existence and fundamental human experiences remain completely foreign to them. Those who, taking as their example Fr. Maximilian Kolbe and Mother Teresa of Calcutta, are able to follow Christ, who laid down His life as a gift for His brothers. Through such great decisions these find a complete freedom of heart and show the world the fascinating beauty of a life which, in its boldness, goes far beyond ordinary common sense logic

It is possible to ascribe Dionysian inspiration to the great decisions of Fr. Kolbe, Mother Teresa of Calcutta, or Edith Stein in the sense that both in their conduct taken as a whole and in their concrete decisions, one finds an intoxication with God. This appears as a

fascination with values which are fundamental in the evangelical view of the world and as a forgetfulness of one's own self in a view that transforms our lives into a gift to others. The Nietzschean play of analogies and oppositions between Dionysus and Christ turns out, on this view, to be too shallow. It does not take into account many points fundamental to Christian doctrine. In his teaching Jesus does not concentrate attention on Himself, but constantly directs it towards the Father. While the creators of new systems were accustomed to emphasize their own originality and contributions, Jesus—in the style of John the Baptist—Himself disappears in order that the Father can grow and become better known. About the doctrine which He transmits, He says directly: "[It] is not mine but the Father's who sent me" (John 14: 24). There is nothing in His speech of the style of the guru who forces on his disciples an unchallengeable truth. He respects human freedom to such an extent that He allows the rich young man to return to the riches which he sees as a great value—and to its accompanying sadness (Luke 18: 23). On the other hand, to all those who were able to show freedom of spirit in great and difficult choices, Jesus reveals the very strange world of Divine paradoxes. Despite rational expectations, on this view happy are those who suffer for their convictions, and who do not concentrate attention on themselves. These are able to leave all the values dear to them in order to experience more deeply their enchantment with God and to achieve that freedom and purity of heart in which our whole being becomes transparent, thereby introducing the bewildering beauty of the *sacrum* into the horizon of ordinary existence. On that view, our "I," submerged in God, disappears; all our life becomes a following in the footsteps of Christ, who left the Father in order to return to Him (John 16: 16). Instead of a simple opposition between Dionysus and Jesus, there occurs the much more fundamental category of holiness, the riches of which cannot be reduced to one model.

Inculturation into Postmodernity

Dionysian categories allow one to interpret the behavior of the mystics, for whom neither everyday language nor classical logic was sufficient to express the richness of their experiences. Those categories also indicate the origin of those great decisions and moral choices which could not be explained in the categories of common-sense or of purely rational action. Dionysian enchantment with the poetics of life can take various forms depending on the scale of values which appear as fundamental in our fascinations. In extreme cases it arises out of a fascination with the illusion of liberation brought by alcohol and narcotics. Our "I," in search of changed forms of the lightness of being,

narrows the horizon and egoistically limits its attention. In the completely opposite formulation, great Dionysian fascination is directed to other people. They can be neighbors understood as a community, it can be a God of mystic ecstasies or even a God found in the prose of service to our neighbors. On that view, our "I" disappears and the fundamental expression is the radiation of the *sacrum*, which receives many forms, including that of personal holiness.

The category of spiritual intoxication with God has found expression both in the language of the mystics and in the prayer of the Church. In the hymn of lauds on Mondays is found the well-known wish:

> Let Christ be our food
> And faith be our drink;
> Let us drink our fill
> From the life-giving spring of the Spirit.

The unity of opposites near to postmodernism is expressed even more fully in the poetic contrasts of the Latin original. The constant drinking from "the life-giving spring of the Spirit" does not allow us to ignore those cultural phenomena in which are expressed the pain, loss, and disappointment of contemporary man. Over the course of the ages, Christianity has shown its dynamism, combining attitudes and values which seemed remote from one another and lacking in internal integration. At the present stage of the development of culture, we must seek new creative forms for the expression of truths whose traditional forms no longer communicate. In the mystery of the Incarnation, God shocks our logic in accepting human nature with its limitations and weakness. True to that style, we should seek new forms of inculturation, in which eternal Divine values are united with that which is imperfect, temporary, and reflect their immediate situation. Indeed on the basis of common-sense human logic the mystery of the Incarnation was so hard to accept, that docetism maintained that Jesus had not a real body, but only an apparent one.

In contemporary culture, Christians often face neo-docetist temptation. It is possible then to undervalue cultural realities as a play of appearances, seeing them as artificial problems, enthusiasms, or exaggerations, lacking rational justification. Christ, however, in the experience of Nazareth entered into a world of petty human affairs which could be taken as existential appearances that introduce divinity into the world. He did this despite the fact that more rational and effective variants of that Incarnation were possible. The solidarity of the eternal Logos with the human drama, which is so close to the sense of the absurd and despair, should inspire a search for a new language for

the transmission of our truth about God. One should not deceive oneself by believing that the dancing Dionysus can pass on the fullness of that truth. But neither can an Apollo concerned above all about the validity of logical inference. There is yet a third possibility, namely that what is needed is precisely an openness to the search for linguistic forms which make it easier to reach those who react with indifference to, and with a feeling of distance from, the discourse of classical theism.

III. ANTHROPOLOGICAL PREMISES OF THE DIONYSIAN DENIAL OF GOD

Despite the fact that the Dionysian affirmation of the beauty of the world could be reconciled with a version of Christianity close to the tradition of St. Francis of Assisi, a decided majority of the representatives of contemporary postmodernism develop a sharp opposition between the Christian vision of life and the Nietzschean apotheosis of the style of Dionysus. There is reason to think that that opposition is a consequence of differences which are not so much theological as anthropological. The Dionysian conception of man no longer allows one to say that he is a subject who integrates many sensations. At the most, he is a flow of a personless stream of excitements, projects, and sensations. This is far removed from the Christian vision of man as being in the image of God.

Thinking Otherwise

"The word 'I' is as hollow as the word 'death,'"[1] writes Richard Rorty, one of the best-known representatives of that line of thought. In the postmodernist world, in which words lose their classical meaning, "there is no such thing as 'first philosophy'—neither metaphysics, nor philosophy of language, nor philosophy of science."[2] The experience of the emptiness of life acts destructively on the fundamental concepts which formed our intellectual tradition. The leap into emptiness can be a desperate act of despair for those who have experienced a particular dose of disappointments. Philosophy, however, cannot become an ordinary reaction to disappointments or even a form of group therapy for the desperate. If we do not want to give the word "philosophy" an entirely new meaning, independent of the intellectual tradition to date, then we must not forget that the duty of the philosopher is to justify theses. The subjective experience of existential emptiness does not free us from the obligation to evaluate the objective logical connections among various opinions.

Today an acute sense of emptiness and serious problems of self-acceptance have become an undeniable cultural phenomenon. That does not, however, entitle one to think that pathological behavior should become the basis for introducing new models either in the philosophy of life or in epistemology. The presently observed dominance of

1 Rorty, CIS, 23.
2 Rorty, CIS, 55.

narcissistic attitudes, the consequence of which is sometimes disruption of social contacts and an escape into despair, require one all the more to pose fundamental questions about a harmonious and integral conception of life. Meanwhile, Bertrand Russell as a representative of liberated Narcissism, anticipates the style of some postmodernists, declaring his aversion to the search for any harmony and depth: "There is no such thing as rationality in relationships. I think that you just have to say okay that's what you feel right now and what are we going to do about it."[3]

A certain type of self-affirmation can lead equally easily to anti-intellectualism and to despair. The transition from a simple "OK" to a complete rejection of life and of contemporary culture turns out to be quite easy. An example of such an approach is the following: "All post-Auschwitz culture, including its urgent critique, is garbage."[4] That last opinion, expressed by Peter Sloterdijk in *Critique of Cynical Reason*, had many defenders among French intellectuals in the 1960's. Some of them, logically, made the attempt to search for radically new models of culture; others were shocked with their iconoclastic projects; still others went so far as to propose apocalyptic visions formulating predictions of which even Nostradamus would not have been ashamed. Frequent changes of mind were a normal occurrence. Protests against traditional schemata and faith in the extraordinary possibilities of intellectual circles new to Western civilization played the major role in determining the direction of those changes. Hence, in his reconstruction of the evolution of Sartre's thought, Mark Poster concludes: "in each case Sartre aligned himself with the progressive forces"[5]

Representatives of the Left then had a monopoly on progress in the opinion-making circles of Paris. Thence, it is easy to understand why Sartre and Aragon elaborated one variant after another of feelings toward Marxism, why participants in the seminars at the Sorbonne listened with interest to reports on the activities of Pol Pot's practice of enlightened genocide in Cambodia, why Foucault expressed his approval of the fanatical leaders of the Islamic Revolution, and why Barthes, together with the *Tel Quel* group, became fascinated with the depth of thought of Comrade Mao. In its revolutionary fervor that very

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3 *Marriage and Morals* (New York: Liveright, 1929), 127; noted by Christopher Lasch, *The Culture of Narcissism: American Life in an Age of Diminishing Expectations* (New York: Norton, 1979), 187.

4 Peter Sloterdijk, *Critique of Cynical Reason* (London: Verso, 1988), 287, quoting Theodor W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, trans. E. B. Ashton (New York: Seabury, 1973), 367.

5 Mark Poster, *Sartre's Marxism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 115.

Tel Quel group even proposed the initiation of a "textual revolution." The uncritical radicalism of such fascinations with the Left led to Ferdinand Brunetière's decision to define intellectuals as "poor souls who are able to use their personal authority for the cultivation of nonsense in the sphere of their incompetence." Independently of skeptical critics, many well-known persons have battled with the imperialism of reason or with a traditional morality that places limitations on human freedom.

After the rebellion of 1968, students treated all statements about values as a manifestation of fascist practice, and their professors declared prophetically that in the free society of the future values would disappear and be replaced by a newly discovered *praxis.*[6] If someone did not want to go along with such predictions and—as did Miłosz at Berkeley—consistently used the word "value" in his lectures, he quickly became known as a fascist. Both traditional metaphysics and classical logic and epistemology were readily seen as means of enslavement. The hope for liberation was connected with revolution. For the adherents of Mao's thought, that was supposed, above all, to be a cultural revolution. Speaking as its first ideologue, Sartre wrote:

> The coming revolution will be very different from the previous ones. It will last much longer and will be much harsher, much more profound. I am not thinking only of France; today I identify myself with the revolutionary battles being fought throughout the world … at least fifty years of struggle will be necessary for the partial victory of the people's power over bourgeois power. There will be advances and retreats, limited successes and reversible defeats, in order finally to bring into existence a new society.… Nothing can guarantee success for us, nor can anything rationally convince us that failure is inevitable. But the alternatives really are socialism or barbarism.[7]

The student disturbances were, for him, a confirmation of the thesis about the possibility of a revolution which will overthrow developed capitalism and bring direct democracy.

In some intellectual institutions it was possible to avoid the Sartrean alternatives of socialism and barbarism. There began to be put

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6 Cf. Jean-Paul Sartre, *Critique of Dialectical Reason*, trans. Alan Sheridan-Smith (London: New Left Books, 1976).

7 Jean-Paul Sartre, "Self-portrait at Seventy," in *Life/Situations*, trans. Paul Auster and Lydia Davis (New York: Pantheon, 1977), 84.

into practice socialist models of a distinctly barbarous character. Many researchers, however, limited themselves to the inquiry into much weightier matters. They combined a decided rejection of Hegelian faith in reason and the meaning of history with an inclination toward the Nietzschean tradition of protest against the time-honored stereotypes. In their protest, they tried to prove that not only was God dead, but the subject and meaning were dead as well. Metaphysics and history were finished. Art had already exhausted its role, remaining only as a place for artistic games. Everyday reality brings us ever more clearly a "psychiatricization" of life in which axiological emptiness finds its fulfillment in the play of appearances. The world of illusions ever more distinctly creates a virtual reality in which there is no way to save the classical concept of realism. In the cultural Disneyland of the contemporary world

> all of Los Angeles and the America that surrounds it are no longer real, but belong to the hyperreal order and to the order of simulation. It is … a question of … concealing the fact that the real is no longer real, and thus of saving the reality principle.[8]

This changes the traditional understanding of philosophy in a fundamental way. In the new realities, to philosophize is, above all, to discover the dramatic dimension of life—to experience pure forces which act on our mind and imagination, uniting man both with nature and with history.[9] Between the pain of emptiness and the experience of surfeit appear radical interpretive ideas which implicitly include an epistemological revolution. Jean Baudrillard, who went through a fascination with Marx and Freud in his youth, provocatively expresses postmodernist epistemology when he says that "theory maintains absolutely no relation with anything at all. … The secret of theory is that truth doesn't exist. … The only thing you can do is play with some kind of provocative logic."[10]

In the world of appearances, the classical distinction between truth and falsity turns out to be without purpose. Simulation and illusion create a new intellectual horizon which interested earlier researchers

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8 Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, trans. Sheila Faria Glaser (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994), 12–13.

9 Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, trans. Paul Patton (London: Athlone Press, 1994), 10.

10 "Forget Baudrillard: An Interview with Sylvere Lotringer," in Mike Gane, ed., *Baudrillard Live: Selected Interviews* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 123–124.

only to a limited extent. One should not, however, worry about statements concerning the death of meaning, and the end of history or of politics. Even the universities appear only as "empty fields from which nothing more will come."[11] That does not mean, however, that one must—like Emil Cioran—"be a dupe or die" in accordance with the principle that "we last as long as do our fictions."[12] One must live despite the experience of pain and despair, with the bitter consciousness of the fact that

> everything that man does ends like that. That's humanity, the tragic aspect of history. Everything that man undertakes turns out just the opposite of what was planned. All of history has an ironic sense. And there will come a moment when man will achieve exactly the contrary of everything that he wanted. In a super-evident way.[13]

Cioran was a recluse and was not one of the postmodernists. In addition, he did not consider himself a philosopher, but a writer of literature. I cite him because, in his aphorisms, he inclined to the work of Nietzsche, who is so congenial to many postmodernists, and because, like many postmodernists, he set for himself the goal of discovering the hidden depth of falsifications present in our culture. Gombrowicz criticized him very sharply for that, writing that "Cioran's words breathe the coldness of the cellar and the mustiness of the grave." Cioran's supporters might respond as follows: 'If cold and mustiness are components of the reality in which we live, then let us not create illusions by artificially raising the temperature and let us not suggest that the essential features of the world have the smell of violets. Freud already emphasized that in the dark room of psychoanalysis it must stink. Deleuze later stated more precisely that that unpleasant smell is the odor of a great death and a small "I." Wanderings into the hidden regions of the psyche of man lead to the climate of the cellar. Acceptance of the brutal truth about the nature of the world requires intellectual courage, which it is not possible to silence by an easy escape from pain and a pessimistic outlook on life.'

Pessimism is not, however, the only permissible form of reaction to our disappointments. Cultural surfeit, indifference, and

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11 Florian Rötzer, *Conversations with French Philosophers*, trans. Gary E. Aylesworth (Atlantic Heights, N.J.: Humanities, 1995), 19.

12 E. M. Cioran, *Entretiens avec François Bondy & al.* (Gallimard: Paris, 1995), 53.

13 Ibid., 58.

emptiness do not have to close us into a personal feeling of pain and despair. They can direct our attention, for example, toward minority groups that have been pushed to the margins of social life. That attitude was felt already by Sartre when, after his final disappointment with the Soviet version of Marxism, he expressed many times his sympathy for the supporters of the Maoist Cultural Revolution, rare as they were in France. He also demonstrated his social radicalism, combined with a rhetoric of liberation and support for the forces of progress, and supported actions promoting regionalism, feminism, and homosexual liberation.[14] Characteristic is the shift of interest by the author of *Being and Nothingness* away from the problems of social philosophy and ontology in the direction of culture. His last work, cut short by his death, was the fourth volume of *The Family Idiot*—a study in which he tried to present the work of Gustave Flaubert as it developed an existentialist psychoanalysis.

All that shows the intellectual climate in which there developed the conviction of the need to search for radically new academic standards, a new approach to philosophical anthropology, and a different formulation of the relation to culture. A certain degree of conjunction of surfeit and disappointments creates a particularly fertile ground for the propagation of declarations about revolution. Great discoveries in the natural sciences are not usually accompanied by such grandiloquent declarations. Neither Copernicus nor Newton presented themselves as revolutionaries; only from the perspective of time were their discoveries seen as revolutions in science. A completely different practice occurs in philosophy, culture and social life, where claims to 'revolutionary' are very popular.

Revolutions in culture or in epistemology seem to be, despite everything, less harmful than organized social revolutions. Their popularity, created by the salon and by uncritical fascinations, differs essentially from the acceptance forced by the application of Bolshevik methods. Their main evil appears in the apotheosis of a nihilistic emptiness. While totalitarian systems of government direct the attention of an oppressed elite to authentic values, cultural revolutions hide that world of values with a rhetoric of liberation, presenting nonsense and axiological emptiness as the highest accomplishment of the human race. It is not a matter of stigmatizing potential revolutionaries who would like to develop the intellectual style of Michurin or Lysenko, performing experiments on culture. It is rather a matter of understanding the context of the human drama, which manifests itself in escapes into intellectual and axiological emptiness, in order to express a protest against the ordered world of rationality and meaning.

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14 M. Poster, op. cit., 117.

The orderly world of classical philosophy stands in clear contrast with our everyday experience of evil, violence, lies, and manipulation. Even if, strictly speaking, it is not so much "our experience" as a coffee house version of the *mysterium iniquitatis*, that does not change the fact that we find in the structure of the world a deep split, which the intellectual will try to rationalize. If classical logic is not sufficient for that purpose, some people try to use psychiatry or psychoanalysis. In place of the classical account of man as the eternal Odysseus or the tragic Oedipus, from the pen of Gilles Deleuze appears a new anthropological vision, developed as a product of the new "thinking against reason." On this view, contemporary exiles of Eve appear as colleagues of Schizo, or of a decolonized Oedipus.

A Nomad in a Concentration-Camp Universe

Deleuze's intellectual development proceeded along the conventional postmodernist road of philosophical interests, a road marked out by Nietzsche, Marx, and Freud. He combined a deep fascination with Nietzsche and a respect for Freud, from whom he took the concept of desire, and for Marx, to whom he owed his political-social views. Before he became known as the author of a work about the dilemmas in capitalism (*Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (1972)), he had already written two monographs on Nietzsche. Among his collaborators and friends was the psychiatrist, Félix Guattari, who was already known as a supporter of Marxism and of the ideas of Jacques Lacan and as the author of "The Nine Theses of the Leftist Opposition."

Deleuze and Guattari accept the thesis about the death of the human subject, earlier advanced by Lacan and Foucault. Where Lacan still used the term "subject," Deleuze wants to speak about the machine. Man is nothing but a machine with a stream of desire. There is no reason to identify man with the subjective "I," because it appears as a subjectless machine designed for the production of associations. In the stream of sensations once identified with the substantial person, we can distinguish the threads of wants, sensations, internal delirial babble, and impersonal desire. It breaks up into smaller structures but reunites into a very complex whole. Meeting and combining, they occupy new territory and lead to new regions of desire. The streams of impersonal desire, or liberated libido, create a new reality. The reader raised on the classics, who is not convinced that Deleuze and Guattari satisfactorily explain the grounds for the creation of new worlds, can only get the information that

the schizophrenic out for a walk is the best model for the analysis of subconscious processes.[15]

Rejecting the traditional Oedipal triangle (mother–father–son), these authors develop their own conception of the subconscious, in which the main role is played by the Schizo; its botanical model is the rhizome. With respect to its intellectual sympathies, the culture of the rhizome is opposed to the culture of the Biblical Tree of Knowledge. The rhizome is complicated not only in its botanical structure; its philosophical description could easily be taken for a parody of the language of philosophy. We learn from this description, among other things, that the rhizome

> constitutes linear multiplicities with *n* dimensions having neither subject nor object, which can be laid out on a plane of consistency, and from which the One is always subtracted (*n*-1). When a multiplicity of this kind changes dimension, it necessarily changes in nature as well, undergoes a metamorphosis.[16]

The complicated threads of the rhizome are supposed to free us from the longing for linear thinking and to teach the different logic of the nomads. "A rhizome has no beginning or end; it is always in the middle, between things, interbeing, *intermezzo*."[17] Similarly, man, as a nomad, does not treat any territory as his own, he feels himself to be everywhere a wanderer whose journey lacks a destination. He experiences his entire life as an *intermezzo*, concentrating attention on what is in between. Absorbed in the process of being constantly on the move, he fills the open place of his wanderings, leaving no footprints behind. That place is precisely a rhizome—complicated, lacking a linear structure, as complex as the fate of beings condemned to perpetual failure to complete his wandering.

The Deleuzean nomad can be associated with the eternal exile. It can call to mind the wandering of Abraham making his way in the dark of the steppes toward an unknown, though promised, land. It can even recall Jesus' words, "foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man has nowhere to lay his head" (Matthew 8: 20),

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15 Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Robert Hurley et al. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983), 2.

16 Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, "Introduction: Rhizome," from *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 21.

17 Ibid., 25.

or the fact that only on the Cross did Jesus find a place where he could finally lay down his head and "give up his spirit" (John 19: 30). The evangelical associations differ, however, from the vision of the nomad proposed by Deleuze and Guattari. Their wanderer has no destination; no Promised Land gives meaning to their efforts. Life's *intermezzo* does not allow him to identify himself with any place. Not only does he find neither hole nor nest at the successive stages of his wanderings, but he experiences the unlimited process of continuous transition from reterritorialization to deterritorialization.

It is difficult to agree with Deleuze that the condition of his nomad is a typical description of the human condition. It is undoubtedly possible to point out a subset of people who feel, in a Deleuzean way, uprooted from history and who are not able to define any important goals in the topography of their lives., but there is no reason to take that particular subset as a representative sample of the human race. Much better justified would seem to be the conception of a man who experiences a deep bond with the world of his ancestors and who even, in his travels around the world, carries in himself the memory of those places which formed his personality and inscribed themselves into his history in a particular way. Our identity is formed by a spiritual bond with those who, despite the fact that they have already died, remain, in a certain way, present and close. We wander with them toward new lands and their presence inspires the style of our wandering.[18] Deprived of the feeling of that bond, the nomad is someone in whom this important component of our humanity—namely, our ties with our history and cultural tradition—is destroyed.

As befitted an attitude like that of the generation of 1968, the Deleuzean nomad is threatened by the machine of the state, which wants to function logically, linearly, preserving order and center. There appears the important conflict between the nomad's condition, full of poetics, and the authoritative structures of the state. The poet, united with the military machine of the nomads, in the name of creative power, plays havoc with order and destroys the traditional representations while looking for the 'Difference' which is considered to be the heart of being. The politician, incorporated into the machinery of the state, wants to preserve that order and to deny differences. His activities change our world into a peculiar *concentration-camp universe*. According to Deleuze, the philosopher, along with the poet, is supposed to join into the great theater of performances, affirming 'Difference' as the source of creative transformations and opposing the totalizing activities of politicians. Despite his borrowings from other systems, Deleuze remains

18 Cf. Maria Janion, *Do Europy: Tak, ale z naszymi umarłymi* (Warsaw: Sic!, 2000), 257.

a recluse in his philosophical ideas. Marx turns out to be far from his ideas, since Deleuze cannot accept class warfare, if only because there is only one class—the slaves. After his rejection of the fundamental role of the Oedipal complex, he had to make a complete break with Freud. The solitary nomad, then, can be associated with the monad of Leibniz. One should not, however, expect that his philosophical ideas would evoke intellectual enthusiasm among revolutionary-recluses.

The Anthropology of the Nomads

The metaphor of the nomad was taken up by many other authors sympathetic with postmodernism. Michel Maffesoli, director of the Centre d'Études sur l'Actuel et le Quotidien at the Sorbonne, places it in the context of insightful analyses from the field of the sociology of culture. On the pages of his *The Contemplation of the World*,[19] he develops the metaphor of life as the wandering of contemporary nomads. He shows an image of man as a prisoner without traditional chains, entangled in a structure of symbols among which he feels himself alienated. The area of his potential wanderings is defined by the collective imagination, in which the radically new social challenges which characterize our time find their reflection. In order to meet those challenges, we must learn the alphabet of postmodernity, seeking new paths of development for our culture.[20]

In *Powers of Horror*, Julia Kristeva, as the counterpart of the nomad, appears as an outcast.[21] She does not ask the question "Who am I?" but only "Where am I?" The place of wanderings differs from that of Deleuze. Uprooted from other values, one can experience ecstasy and excitement on the path of rejection, despite the fact that one cannot define one's own "I" in any clear or precise way. In the play of metaphors practiced by Kristeva, references to ecstasy appear as unexpectedly as digressions on physiology. Reflections on the topic of beauty stand in stark contrast to remarks on perversion and sin.[22] Perhaps the rhizomes of free associations are, in such a discourse, above all evidence of loss on that path of the nomads which transforms the

19 Michel Maffesoli, *The Contemplation of the World: Figures of Community Style*, trans. Susan Emanuel (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996).

20 I discuss the views of Maffesoli, and especially their Dionysian theme, in the section entitled "Dancing Dionysus" above.

21 Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. Leon S. Roudier (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982).

22 Cf. Edith Wyschograd, "Saintliness and Some Aporias of Postmodernism," in PG, 344–348.

cosmic homeland of man into a concentration-camp universe. The drama of escape from the classical conception of rationality and meaning remains moving evidence of the cosmic loneliness which tells us to search for an alternative universe.

In the intellectual turning points specific to particular periods, we find corresponding metaphors and linguistic models. Many of us formed our philosophy during the time in which physics played the leading role in shaping worldviews. Vestiges of that period can be seen also in postmodernism, if only in its none too fortunate statements about (n-1)-dimensional rhizomes. One must, however, note that the attempt to raise the fundamental questions of philosophy in postmodernism is often developed in the language of psychiatry and psychoanalysis. This is perhaps a characteristic symptom of a time in which more people turn for help to psychologists and psychiatrists than are interested in the new successes of physics. Those who do not have to make use of psychoanalysis value literature and poetry far more highly than a much more incomprehensible physics. Hence, in postmodernism there is a complementary interest in the language of metaphors and poetic figures of speech. In extreme cases, postmodernists go so far as to suggest that the human person be treated as the counterpart of a literary text. It turns out, then, that "much nineteenth and twentieth century discourse about … the nature of man … is remarkably clarified if we substitute 'poem' for 'person' …."[23] On that view, textualized man appears and there is no objective reason to speak about his special place among other texts. In place of a *logos* generating a world of rationality and meaning comes only a constellation of poetic metaphors to which we can ascribe various meanings at will.

In their discovery, the radical representatives of the social sciences and psychoanalysis, and in particular Freud, are often cited. Freud's work allows one to introduce an egalitarianism where a distinction was previously made between the genius and the psychopath or the scribbler. As Philip Rieff says: "Freud democratized genius by giving everyone a creative unconscious."[24] Democratized genius refers to the creative unconscious in places where earlier generations emphasized the weight of critical, rational reflection. This democratization of anthropology, in turn, does not allow the introduction of a distinction between *animal rationale* and the patient in a psychiatric clinic. The average person can consider escape into mediocrity as a cultural proposal suited to the interests of those who

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23 Harold Bloom, *Kabbalah and Criticism* (New York: Seabury Press, 1975), 112.

24 Philip Rieff, *Freud: The Mind of the Moralist* (New York: Viking, 1959), 35.

have freed themselves from Enlightenment illusions and who are calmly able to say "OK" to life.

The ability to accept oneself and the conditions of one's life could be an accomplishment in psychoanalytic therapy; it is difficult, however, to treat it as the highest accomplishment in anthropology. The illusion of the time of La Mettrie was the attempt to reduce human existence to the level of machines known in the eighteenth century. The similar illusion of our time is the reduction of the truth about man to the level of the reactions characteristic of the neurotic. Reductionism, regardless of whether it appears in a mechanistic version or in a psychoanalytic one, is an article of faith in which the fundamental truths of anthropology are ignored. Depression and complexes, which are the natural object of concern for the psychoanalyst, give rise in the case of anthropology to easy, though unjustified, generalizations. In the substantive evaluation of such generalizations, it is difficult to avoid the question: On what basis does Deleuze assert that the nomad wanders in a place deprived of goals or values? Certainly in clinical practice each psychiatrist meets patients with disturbed personalities who do not see any goal or meaning in their lives. The decision to treat all of humanity as the frequenters of the psychiatry clinic is, however, a stretch which the ideologue might try to defend, but not the logician. The logician will always use the particular quantifier, distinguishing various human attitudes towards life, and it would be scientifically sound, within that set of attitudes, to identify precisely the subset described by Deleuze, Guattari, and Maffesoli. However, it would be extremely pretentious to try to construct a revolutionary anthropology on the foundations of a pathology.

The representatives of postmodernism themselves recognize the arbitrariness of many intellectual analyses of contemporary society and culture. Lyotard indicates this in a letter of 5 January 1985 to Augustine Nancy, writing:

> The decline of modern ideas … entails a vacancy of the place once occupied by intellectuals (in the style of Zola). Consider the tragic errors befalling those unwilling to acknowledge the gravity of the crisis: Sartre, Chomsky, Negri, Foucault. And don't laugh. These misjudgments must be inscribed in the tableau of postmodernity.[25]

25 Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Explained*, trans. Don Barry (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 72.

Mistake, crisis, and despair are undoubtedly the constituent elements of our intellectual landscape. It would, however, be a misunderstanding to treat them as the last chord in the development of European culture. Philosophy was born in crises, thanks to the overcoming of despair and to the correction of mistakes.

A Call from the Depths of Pain

Unjustified generalizations which are introduced wholesale in the anthropological thought of postmodernism can be irritating in their carelessness. At the same time, however, they are important testimonies to the mentality of a time in which changes in culture are accompanied by deep disruptions in interpersonal communication. As a result, the community of meaning built up by steadfast earlier efforts of *animal rationale* is destroyed. Interpersonal solidarity disappears, since the very concept of the human person, of human dignity, and of inalienable rights are rejected as a metaphysical relic. Rhizomes of metaphors can work positively at a certain state of therapy; they do not help, however, to overcome a crisis of identity. Atomized, fractured humanity is not capable of finding in itself that substantial subject about which so much was written by those who philosophically glorified rationality. At a certain stage of life, the experience of emptiness, loss, and wandering without a destination can appear as a psychologically closer proposal than can the world of metaphysical abstractions. The metaphors of Cioran will be more suggestive than Boethius' definition of the person. Consideration of the qualitatively new condition of man does not, however, authorize the construction of any variety of "metaphysics for the frustrated," which would become a denial of classical metaphysics. It would, by its very nature, have to become the same kind of pathology as did "proletarian physics" or "Nazi anthropology." Our experience of pain has no influence on the logical structure of the world or on the character of the laws of nature. Pain can, however, cause both logic and nature to take on sinister features since our personal experience of drama overshadows our other relations with the world. The search for conceptual means which would allow the depersonalized nomads to rebuild their faith in the meaning and beauty of the world is a common concern.

The phenomenon of spiritual schism in the experience of a cemetery is not a feature unique to our time. Its description can already be found in St. Mark, who presents the demoniac of Gerasa living among the tombs. The Gerasene says of himself: "My name is Legion; for we are many" (Mark 5: 9 ff.). The use of the plural is noteworthy: "we are many" is said by one concrete person. His name appears as the symbol of a civilization in which the loss of one's own personality

comes along with an agglomeration of miscellaneous opinions, acting on our psyche in the mass media or in the voice of the cultural elite. In the Gospel, this "man who is legion" has, as his natural environment, the cemetery and the herd of swine, which at a certain stage of his life exhaust the horizon of his existence. Only the appearance of Christ introduces deep transformations into that small world of horribly reduced values.

Today's "legionaries of Gerasa" are not even capable of noticing that their name is Legion and that they use the plural when they should express their own opinions. The amalgamation of mutually contradictory opinions creates in their psyche a chaos which one could try to heal in dialogue with Christ, in an openness to the reality of grace. When, however, we do not notice among contemporary legionaries either an openness to the grace of Christ or any desire for healing from the current diseases of civilization, we are sometimes inclined to apply means more radical than those used by Jesus in Gerasa. In an impulse of dogmatism we would make possible not only the drowning of the swine but also of our contemporary Gerasenes, who have lost both the meaning of life and their own identity. Theses inspired by political correctness and the slogans of 1968 evoke our irritation and fears that in the contemporary Gerasa the demoniacs want to dictate principles from the cemetery.

How different is the reaction of Jesus. His calm leads finally to the former demoniac "begging Him that he might be with Him" (Mark 5: 18). Jesus does not agree to fulfill that request, but He does transform the erstwhile resident of the tombs into His disciple, saying to him: "Go home to your friends, and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you" (Mark 5: 19). We do not know anything about the success of evangelization with which the atypical disciple was charged. The style of Jesus, however, teaches us that we should not introduce dichotomized divisions into our world in the face of present challenges, but should constantly seek means which allow us to transform a horizon of despair into a sphere of meaning.

Postmodernism expresses feelings which, in our generation, prey on the minds even of people who have no interest in philosophy. Among the contemporary creators of culture one very often meets people who are not capable of handling fundamental questions about God, the conception of man, the meaning of life, suffering and love. In the style of St. Thomas the Apostle, they experience deep perplexity. The spectrum of opinions between the skepticism of Thomas the Apostle and the rebellion of Nietzsche allows for many intermediate states in the lives of contemporary nomads. It is necessary to notice that it is precisely Doubting Thomas, who had the courage to make the special request for an empirical verification of Jesus' wounds, who was

the first among the Apostles to declare that Jesus was God (John 20: 28). That shocking experience—in the terminology of Karl Jaspers, a boundary situation—radically changed his whole vision of the world, giving a most beautiful meaning to Jesus' words: "do not be faithless, but believing." (John 20: 27).

There are situations of life in which the classical logic of Aristotle fails, but in which the life-logic of wounds can still be effective. People who are wounded by life and struggling with many difficult problems, find, in the encounter with a living Christianity which allows one to deal with the most sensitive subjects, a perspective which resolves the perplexities of their lives. There is a logic of wounds not encountered in the textbooks of logic, in which one can alleviate one's doubts. The Cross of Christ and the perspective of the Resurrection point us to this logic. The truth of faith is significantly richer than anything a logician, using the principles of classical logic, can express.

We cannot state the paradoxes of the Gospel or the content of the Sermon on the Mount with the help of Aristotelian principles of deduction. The dramas presented by the creators of culture, which are the subject of inquiry of Zbigniew Herbert's furrow-browed Leonardo,[26] allow us to show the essence of the Gospel in terms that are nearer to life and much more understandable for contemporary seekers of the truth. The dialogue with contemporary culture leads us in the direction of that grand, rich harmony, an unavoidable component of which is also the prayer of wounds which accompanies lonely struggles in search of a hidden meaning of life.

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26 Zbigniew Herbert concludes his poem "Thomas" with the words:

and so doubt is permitted
consent to questioning
for still something is worthy of the brow
in the furrows of Leonardo
Vinci

(*Epilog burzy* (Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Dolnośląskie, 1998), 51).

IV. PHILOSOPHIZING AFTER THE DEATH OF THE SUBJECT

> Looked at from the perspective of the Gulag, we people of the West must look like defectives and cretins.
>
> —André Glucksmann[1]

The phenomenon which Glucksmann considered to be a description of the situation resulting from the collision of the different perspectives of West and East, was considered by many Western academic institutions to be unavoidable and for various cultural reasons. The combination of social radicalism and clear anti-intellectualism bore fruit in the opinion-making circles of the West in the sub-culture of 1968. There an aversion to the classical intellectual tradition was as strong as the earlier aversion of those circles to statements about Soviet labor camps. The shaping of history led logically to corresponding attempts to shape anthropology. Expressions of that trend are both the personal work of Foucault and the famous lecture on the end of man given by Derrida in 1968. Those presentations led to strong accusations about the radical anti-humanism of the philosophy of deconstruction and evoked a critical reaction from the French bishops against the philosophical ideas of Lacan and Foucault.

Liberated from Subjectivity

The French structuralists put an extreme interpretation upon the thesis of the dependence of the 'ego' on social, linguistic, and cultural structures. Those structures are supposed to exert such a great influence on our behavior, decisions, and statements, that the assertion *cogito ubi sum* turns out to be much better justified than the Cartesian *cogito ergo sum*. The content of our thought is dependent on external causes to such a great degree that the very *cogito*—"I think"—itself turns out to be only a manifestation of a certain linguistic convention. In reality, the only sound formulation would be the impersonal: "one thinks"—in order to determine the impersonal flow of consciousness in which concrete evaluations, feelings, and desires appear. Thus Michel Foucault

1 Cited in Gustaw Herling-Grudziński. *Dziennik pisany nocą 1979–1999* (Warsaw: Czytelnik, 2000), 249.

himself, on the pages of *What is an Author?*[2] went so far as to make the radical assertion that human subjectivity is diffused in language. Man cannot be treated as the sovereign subject of his own statements and thoughts, since in those statements the main role is played by the set of linguistic structures which are prior to our statements.

Should one want to protest the application of techniques of deconstruction to the 'ego' it would be necessary to recall the views of Baudrillard. He emphasized that one cannot distinguish between reality and illusion because it is also a characteristic feature of our culture that imitation, illusion, and simulation are so suggestive that they make it impossible to distinguish the real world from the sphere of representations. Baudrillard calls our current cultural situation a world "after the orgy" and takes as its characteristic feature the fact that everything that can be liberated has already been liberated from theology and metaphysics, morality and classical aesthetics. We could practice some kind of universal agnosticism in the form of poetry or of literary miniatures. On this new view, anthropology seems only a certain form of poetry, and with inordinately ambitious pretensions to scientific status.[3]

A deep transformation in our understanding of both the human subject itself and of its role in society and in culture follow from the deconstruction of the classical conception of the human person. This results in attempts to make a postmodernist interpretation of humanism and to introduce a radically new interpretation of conscious human life. A further consequence is the radical questioning of the classical conception of the human person, of the meaning of life, and of the conception of truth. In place of the great questions of philosophy there appear small narratives which introduce the possibility of linguistic games, ironic aphorisms, and unverifiable metaphors. Such procedures are methodologically justified and—as René Wellek writes—in the postmodernist theory of knowledge many thinkers welcomed this view "as liberation, since it gives license to the arbitrary spinning of metaphors, to the stringing of puns, to mere language games."[4] If it is acknowledged that the classical distinction between reality and fiction cannot consistently be defended, then in place of the receptive subject building a world of human values we find an impersonal stream of associations and desires functioning at the level of puns and metaphors.

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2 1969. Reprinted in *Language, Counter-Memory, and Practice*, ed. Donald P. Bouchard (New York: Cornell University Press, 1977).

3 Cf. Kurt Vonnegut, Jr., *Wampeters, Foma and Granfalloons* (New York: Delta Books, 1974), 176.

4 René Wellek, "Destroying Literary Studies," *New Criterion* 2 (1983): 4: 3.

Human Life as a Form of Literature

On the view just described, human life can be treated as a particular form of literature, in which various interpretations can be ascribed to various forms of writing.[5] However, the art of life, in which the human subject disappears and the borders between reality and fiction are blurred, becomes entangled in deep inconsistencies. Its methodology contains self-destructive components. Because the concepts of the subject and of objective reality disappear, it becomes possible to treat everything as a form of fiction. Further, there is no reason to ascribe any weight to the texts of the postmodernists. Their critics can then treat the entire corpus of Derrida's writings only as a certain form of literature the conditions of which must be sought at the level of psychology and the social sciences. Making use of the first of the above-named possibilities, Vincent B. Leitch maintains in his *Deconstructive Criticism*[6] that the most representative of Derrida's works, *Glas*,[7] reveals a neurosis, or even a schizophrenia, not only of the author but also of his ardent followers.

The deconstructionist resignation from classical rationality and from the requirement that philosophical theses be justified leads finally to self-destruction. The new philosophical ideas of deconstructionism attract many authors who avoid fundamental methodological questions and blur the objective differences between a dialogue of Plato and the feuilleton of a graphomaniac. The deconstruction both of the human subject and of the classical conceptions of rationality and of cognitive realism creates a unique possibility for escape into anti-intellectualism.

That questioning the above-mentioned theses is rather a manifestation of a literary creativity and, in turn, an expression of subjective sensation than a substantively justified theory, is shown explicitly in the evolution of the views of Michel Foucault. The author of *The Order of Things*[8] has long been seen as the main critic of the classical conception of the subjective "I." His views changed during his visit to the USA as a result of his personal experiences in boundary

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5 Cf. Jacques Derrida, *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 292 ff., and *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakaravarty Spivak (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), 159–160.

6 Vincent B. Leitch, *Deconstructive Criticism: An Advanced Introduction* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983).

7 Jacques Derrida, *Glas*, trans. John P. Leavey, Jr., and Richard Rand (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1986).

8 Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1971).

situations. These included, among others, a hike in Death Valley organized by some California friends. There he experienced extremely high temperatures, a dreary desert landscape not showing any signs of life, shades of gray among severe rocks and sand, and the blueness of the sky changing quickly as evening fell. The organizers of the hike proposed that their Parisian guest take two pills of LSD. He was afraid, but in the end he put aside his fears and accepted their proposal. The effect, which followed quickly, was a swirling world in which a night sky from a Van Gogh painting was combined with an exceptionally strong experience of the reality of an unusual combination of impressions. For Foucault, it was such a powerful experience that he no longer had any doubt that his own subjective "I" had experienced the very vivid situation. From the time of that visit, he changed his earlier views on the topic of the real existence of the human subject. What had seemed to him to be an illusion in the anonymous atmosphere of Paris manifested its vivid reality in the context of his qualitatively new American experiences.

In Foucault's American notes, a fascination with the rediscovered personal "I" is combined with his enchantment with anonymous sex, the California varieties of which he discovered visiting the gay nightclubs of San Francisco. The feeling of happiness, fulfillment, and great excitement preserved in his travel notebooks is additionally nuanced, if one takes into consideration that the French philosopher made those notes while already carrying in his body the HIV virus as a biological souvenir of his visit to California. The atmosphere of unhealthy mystery which accompanied his illness receded when, after his death in June 1984, it was made known that his death was the result of AIDS.

Properties without Man

Cioran tried to express the drama of human existence when he wrote: "I have no external life; I am a man without a biography."[9] The anonymity of interpersonal relations forms the psyche of beings which function as individuals without a biography or without individual properties, like a character from a Musil novel. In literary constructions one can sometimes experience concrete desires but, in a sea of inconstant properties, one does not experience any subjective "I." The discovery of one's own personality is achieved only in the dramatic context which combines pathology with a feeling of the tragic dimension of human existence. The problem consists in this, that in

9 E. M. Cioran, *Entretiens avec François Bondy & al.* (Gallimard: Paris, 1995), 55.

order to counteract the paraintellectual practices of raising pathology to the rank of a standard model, an attempt is made to present tragedy as one of the many names of burlesque, combining liberating pathos with common vulgarity.

The attempt to lay the foundations of radically new disciplines by appeal to revolutionary slogans had been made before. Among the pathologies created in our century are Nazi anthropology, proletarian biology, and Aryan physics. The classic authors of that type include not only Lysenko and Michurin, but also Nobel Prize winners Philipp Lenard and Johannes Stark, famous for having praised Hitler as a true philosopher with a clear mind, while criticizing Max Planck and Werner Heisenberg as "white Jews."[10] Among the precursors of the revolutionary style in which both culture and history were destroyed is the Chinese Emperor Shih Huang-ti, who in 213 BC ordered the public burning of all documents from the governments of earlier rulers and made a determined effort to extend the Great Wall of China.

At the root of such attempts is the mentality of the provinces, in which limitations of space and the destruction of historical perspective are an important instrument in the government of souls. In present conditions, the combination of cultural globalization with a universalism free from the mentality of the provinces (with its reaction to the cultural surfeit after the orgy) remains a problem of particular importance. There is no way that this process can be realized in the same way in all cultures. However, earlier experiences, which allow us to distinguish the relatively lasting humanistic legacy from popular but substantively unfounded declarations, can be helpful.

The period in which existentialism first appeared in post-war Europe was also marked by deeply different evaluations of that philosophical school. While some were fascinated with the pessimistic vision of the world, its radical critics tried to equate Sartre's philosophy with the techniques of humiliation applied in Nazi concentration camps. Half a century later, not much remained of the philosophical divagations of Sartre; the once famous *romans à clef* in the style of Simone de Beauvoir's *The Mandarins* are now seen as nothing more than products of complexes and refined prejudices. What remains, however, from the existentialist tradition of that period are the humanistic message of Albert Camus and of Gabriel Marcel, as well as the examples of human perplexities and inquiries present, for example, in the dramas of Sartre himself.

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10 See A. D. Beyerchen, *Scientists Under Hitler: Politics and the Physics Community in the Third Reich* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977), 95–96 and 158.

Such distinctions must be applied also to contemporary postmodernism in which we find works of drastically varied value. The weakest point of this trend is its critique of the human subject which gives an objective foundation to the charges that existentialism is antihumanist. The consequence of questioning the general role of the reflexive subject is the destruction of the horizon of meaning and of value that is proper to man. On that view one departs from belief both in the rational possibilities of man and in his ethical sensitivity as this is subordinated to objective norms. As a result, one is very close to a rejection of those values which appear to be the most important key cultural achievements of the human family. That threat is all the more real because a combination of globalism and relativism is the disquieting characteristic of our time. While the world has become a global village in which the rapid flow of information creates a new type of connection unknown to earlier generations, the universal unifying factors remain above all the advertising slogans and entertainment serials directed to a universal audience. However, they lack the universal values which would express either the dignity of the human person or some version of humanism closely connected to the great tradition of the past. In this situation, moral relativism becomes one permissible philosophy. There would not, then, be any substantive reason to defend the rights which appear to be unquestionable in our view of man, his history, and his behavior.

If racism and anti-Semitism were only a manifestation of anthropological metaphors, to which it was not possible to give any moral evaluation, then there would be no basis either for the rejection of Nazism or for the organization of the Nuremberg Trials. Those convicted at Nuremberg would, on that view, have to be rehabilitated, if only because the Nazi Party originally came to power in accordance with the will of the majority of the electorate and because later legal regulations of Nazi Germany have their counterpart in the practice of many other nations involved in military actions. Such questions remain without a convincing answer if one does not introduce an appeal to the inalienable rights of man or to the concept of the dignity of the human person. One must note, however, that both the concept of the person and of human dignity are expressions of a metaphysical anthropology which goes far beyond what is given in experience and beyond those interpretive models near to the so-called contemporary mentality. In his cultivation of the latter, Richard Rorty explicitly rejects the concept of human nature, regarding it as relic of metaphysics. He writes: “I do not think that there is any such thing as human nature. I think that human beings create themselves by learning language, that means by

enculturating themselves and accepting the set of social practices united to that way of speaking."[11]

One can point to an anticipation of approximately that view in the mid-twentieth century in the work of Jean-Paul Sartre. That author maintained that the existential takes priority over essence and that the activities which we undertake constitute our essence. Fifty years after the formulation of that thesis no one defends it anymore. One can express the hope that the anthropological discussions, so important if only in the context of contemporary experiments with cloning, will go in a direction different from that suggested by Rorty's radical pragmatism.

Research centers which for methodological reasons reject both the concept of the person and the concept of human nature become involved in deep internal incoherencies since, based on the methodological foundations of behaviorism, they try to reduce the human person to a set of operations and behaviors. Recently concrete proposals from the field of bioethics have become the subject of heated discussion consequent upon radical proposals like those presented by Peter Singer,[12] an Australian working at the Center for Human Values at Princeton. Singer is widely known as a radical activist in the Animal Liberation Movement. His radicalism has, however, taken a surprising direction. While the majority of the supporters of the Movement are trying to bring animal rights closer to human rights, Singer has proposed that human rights be reduced to the level of the rights accorded to animals, in particular to chimpanzees.

He shocked his colleagues by publishing radical theses to the effect that not only should the termination of an advanced pregnancy be permitted, but so should the killing of a child under the age of one year be non-criminal for the same reason that the killing of a chimpanzee is not. In his radical anthropology, Singer rejects both the concept of the dignity of the human person and faith in the immortal character of the human soul. With the rejection of those concepts, the main empirical manifestation of what is distinctive about man is his level of intelligence. The intelligence of a several-month-old child does not differ in any important way from the intelligence of a chimpanzee. From that, Singer, proclaiming a philosophy of free choice, declares himself in favor of the fundamental permissibility of killing both small children and chimpanzees of a comparable level of intelligence. The right of decision in the case of children can be exercised by the parents. If the parents come to the conclusion that their child would have to suffer on

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11 Richard Rorty, "Filozofia pasożytuje na wyobraźni poetyckiej," in Bronisław Wildstein, *Profile wieku* (Warsaw: Politeja, 2000), 147.

12 Peter Singer, *Rethinking Life & Death: The Collapse of our Traditional Ethics* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994).

account of a congenital heart defect or would be ridiculed by others on account of its red hair, the decision remains exclusively theirs whether to allow the child to live or to use euthanasia and—to speak euphemistically—to assist in its death.

Singer's radical proposals have evoked a lively reaction both in academic and journalistic circles.[13] They are cited in discussions of euthanasia and the care of the mentally handicapped. Singer's critics draw attention to the fact that his ethics of the "quality of life" has clear analogies to the proposals of Nazi supporters of eugenics.[14] Despite the fact that Singer does not adduce any postmodernist inspiration for his views, his radical ideas show, in a drastic way, the consequences of a relativism in which the concept of the human person as the subject of rational action is put into question. On this view ideas which can go beyond the harmless margins of academic life take on a new meaning that entails both varying forms of nihilism and the real threat of nihilistic totalitarianism.

The End of Grand Narratives?

The characteristic feature of the human intellectual condition is the search for the answers to the great theoretical questions of philosophy and theology. In opposition to traditional philosophical practice, which was supposed to provide satisfying answers to all the questions which preyed upon people's minds, Jean-François Lyotard, the father of postmodernism, suggests on the pages of *Just Gaming*[15] the possibility of a search for "little narratives," which are supposed to bring answers to the concrete questions which were once raised by the great philosophical systems. One should not reject this proposal in advance. In a commentary on the anthropological reflections of Gabriel Marcel, one of the reviewers remarked that Marcel's aphorisms and essays provide deeper and more intellectually inspiring truths about the world of the human person than did the systematic works found in many traditional schools of philosophy. The fundamental charge that is sometimes directed at little narratives is that they usually make use of systematic works of metaphysics in their treatment of the particular problems of anthropology and ethics. Marcel turns out to be convincing for so many readers because hidden in his essays and metaphors are

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13 Cf. for example, Sławomir Zagórski, "Świętość przeciw jakości," *Gazeta wyborcza*, 17–18 July 1999; *Fronda* (1999): No. 15–16.

14 George Weigel, *Soul of the World: Notes on the Future of Public Catholicism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 198.

15 Jean-François Lyotard and Jean-Loup Thébaud, *Just Gaming*, trans. Wlad Godzich (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985).

both a clear vision of the human person and a humanistic hierarchy of values. However, the situation is entirely different when the attempt is made to develop little narratives in an atmosphere of axiological and metaphysical emptiness.

The thought of Lyotard was formed in the sphere of influence of an intellectual tradition completely different from that of Marcel. Despite the fact that he studied at the Sorbonne, he formed his most important views among the collaborators on the Marxist journal *Socialisme ou Barbarie*. In *The Postmodern Condition* (1979), a foundational book for postmodernism, he considers the most important feature of postmodernity to be the crisis of faith in the grand metanarratives (*récits*), which were supposed to provide a comprehensive vision of the world and thus to serve as the ultimate foundation for the evaluation of its systems. One can acknowledge the truth of that thesis in the sense that present cultural evolution leads both to the atomization of society and to the fragmentary nature of our knowledge about the world. The process of globalization is limited in principle to a certain homogenization of advertisements and products, but this does not entail the creation of a system of universal truths which would be able to integrate the whole human family. Rather one notes the syndrome of Tuwim's "terrible middle-class man."[16] The characters of Tuwim's poem saw all things separately, and put together the various domains of their experiences into a mosaic of life in which there were no leading integrating ideas. Lyotard seems to suggest that the intellectual style of the terrible middle-class man is the only option for us. It is not possible to attain a comprehensive vision of the world with the help of critical and certified types of knowledge. In a pluralistic, atomized society one must learn to live without grand narratives, which have already brought us so many disappointments in the past.

Lyotard's suggestion appears highly arbitrary when we consider that, as an example of grand narratives, he most often includes Hegel's philosophy of history, the Marxist conception of emancipation, and the Christian theology of Redemption.[17] There is no objective reason to place those concepts on the same level. One can give many arguments for the definitive falsification of Marxist soteriology, but it would be difficult to justify a need to reject the Christian vision of salvation. The examples given by Lyotard neither exhaust the set of intellectually interesting grand narratives nor justify theses about the necessity of rejecting all such classical narratives. Equally arbitrary are his subjective assertions that God is no longer a problem for the contemporary mentality. Such a formulation suggests that there is a

16 Julian Tuwim, "Mieszkańcy," in *Biblia Cygańska* (1933).

17 The works of Lyotard contain varied examples of grand narratives.

clearly defined set of monolithic attitudes, interests, and evaluations which explicitly determine the so-called contemporary mind. Meanwhile, the fundamental feature of contemporary culture is its pluralism, expressed in the clash of opposite evaluations and opinions.

The rejection of universal values, the critique of grand narratives, and the declaration of the death of the subject lead to a view in which felicity of small metaphors in combination with a touch of irony is supposed to fill the horizon of the intellectual interests of the human species. The way to counteract that discouraging perspective is to take into consideration the historical roots of the most important cultural attitudes which played a decisive role in the formation of the European tradition. That does not by any means require us to absolutize our experience of the past. It reminds us only that "liberation" from history, i.e., radical detachment from those values which have shaped our culture over the centuries, can bring an escape from meaning, the consequence of which will be absurdity. If the set of values fundamental to the understanding of man as *animal rationale* is carelessly rejected in the alternative anthropology, then the best that will be possible is the appearance of *homo ludens* as the culmination of humanity. In that direction tend cultural proposals glorifying "the unbearable lightness of being." These are seen as an alternative to attitudes of life in which moral responsibility comes along with the choice of the difficult values which play a fundamental role in the evolution of European culture.

What logically follows could be the destruction not only of the world of science but of the world of art as classically understood. Postmodernist art

> contains in itself its own negation: the creation of art can be art and the destruction of art can be art, the making of art can be art and the not-making of art can be art. Everything can be art and what we will talk about as art depends on us.[18]

The use of the expression "depends on us" puts exclusive emphasis on the element of consensus, because "we," being the plural form of the subjectively understood "I," is already subject to deconstruction, lost irreversibly together with the grand narratives of the philosophers and the theologians.

Fetishes in Place of the Person

In the development of European thought, Christianity played a major role in the formation both of the concept of the human person and

18 Grzegorz Dziamski, "Sztuka po moderniźmie," *Odra* (2000): 10: 62.

of the principles of contemporary personalism.[19] The long and thorny road which led to the secularization of the concept of the person in contemporary humanism finds a methodologically surprising counterproposal attempting to eliminate categories which are of fundamental significance for a broadly understood humanism on the basis of subjective impressions and the play of metaphors freed from the principles of logical deduction. Such a practice leads not only to the discard of the classical concept of the person and of terms corresponding to it; its consequence is also the destruction of the humanistic world of values and meaning. In their place most often appear trivialities or political correctness.

Thinkers as different from one another as Czesław Miłosz, Ernst Gombrich, and Leszek Kołakowski complain that in the leftist academic circles of the West it is possible to become known as a reactionary or a fascist for merely acknowledging an absolute difference between good and evil or for using the term "absolute value." The conditions of being progressive and up-to-date are supposed, on that view, to be relativism and nihilism. For that reason also, the main representative of liberal thought, Friedrich von Hayek, warns about a "totalitarian democracy" in which the tyranny of the majority can be practiced thanks to the fact that democracy understood only in terms of slogans is, at present, both a fetish and a taboo.[20] In the world of the fetishes introduced in populist postmodernism there disappear both the great humanistic tradition and the Enlightenment faith in progress, science, and reason.

The questioning of absolute and universal human values leads to the creation of artificial absolutes and results in the absolutization of tribal bonds, racial factors, sociopolitical systems, and even support for sports teams. The cultural consequence of such an attitude is both the logic of Hutu Power and the ethics of soccer hooligans. The origin of the latter, however, cannot be causally connected with postmodernism. It is the consequence of a more general and mechanism: of desperate attempts to fill emptiness by aggression. It is easiest to fill the empty place left by the dethroned absolute by making new absolutes out of values which have only a short-lived and limited character. The cult of idols, known to the ancients, appears as the cultural challenge of an age declaring the death of God, man, and meaning. In the new forms of tribal mentality, new fetishes begin to function, the presence of which no longer allows one to apply to man the proud name *animal rationale.*

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19 I write about this in my *Europejska wspólnota ducha* (Warsaw: ATK, 1998), 59–71.

20 Guy Sorman, "Friedrich von Hayek: Liberals Must Be Agitators," in *Freedom on Bail: The Real Thinkers of the Twentieth Century*, trans. Asha Puri (New Delhi: Vikas, 1990), 211–218.

Polytheism returns as an attractive proposal for enlivening a world from which absolutes have disappeared.

The identification of a fundamental set of universal human values which does not depend on social or cultural causes is a way of counteracting this new cult of the idols. To that set belong values which, in the classical tradition, were called transcendentals and include truth, goodness, and beauty. Among those values should also be found: the dignity of the human person, freedom, love of neighbor, justice, solidarity, and tolerance. Their relation to the axiological message contained in the Sermon on the Mount does not require separate comment.

The radical proposals of postmodernism remain a problem, for in them an attempt is made to show that the acceptance of truth is a form of enslavement of the mind and that truth should be rejected as a value in order to avoid the so-called imperialism of truth. In this same style, there is also support for attempts to reinterpret freedom in terms of extreme individualism and to reject comprehensive visions of life as so-called grand narratives. In the face of such reinterpretive practices, it is hard to avoid the question: Will it be possible to speak about human existence once one questions the Thomistic principle recalled by John Paul II at UNESCO: *genus humanus arte et ratione vivit*?

The Ecology of Human Culture

Emphasizing the cultural causes of human existence, the Holy Father recalled in that same speech of 2 June 1980:

> Culture is a specific mode of man's "existing" and of his "being." Man always lives according to his own culture; it creates, in turn, a bond between men which is peculiar to each one and determines the interpersonal and social character of human existence. … Culture is that which makes man become ever more man; he "has" more being and is able to "become" more human … Whatever man owns is only of importance, regarding culture, to the degree that man, by means of what he "owns" becomes more fully man at all levels of his existence.[21]

21 John Paul II, "The World as an Environment for Humanity," Address to the Executive Council of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), 2 June 1980, in *Origins* 10 (12 June 1980): 58–64.

Contemporary discussions on the subjectivity of man should find their completion in a search for models of culture which make the full development of the human person possible. One does not have to wait for universal agreement on the determination of the criteria of that development because, for some critics of modernity, the very concept "human person" is a relic of metaphysics which should be definitively renounced. Independently of the differences which occur, it must be noted that culture is the element of human ecology the destruction of which can have consequences particularly painful for our species. In the nineteenth century, in the name of a naïve fascination with technology, nature was ravaged, the natural environment of man devastated. It is possible now also to create an intellectual climate in which ideological declarations and arbitrary evaluations will inspire another attempt to destroy values fundamental to the human world.

The proposals of ideological postmodernism are to a large extent the result of a reaction to the cultural transformations of our time. Representatives of that school develop their thoughts not only in the ivory tower of the university, but also in psychiatric clinics, in avant-garde art circles, and in the editorial offices of opinion-making journals. If one takes into consideration the variety of intellectual perspectives, then it is difficult to see any mechanisms of rational development in the cultural transformations predominant on the European continent. The attempt to make a rational evaluation of such transformations is immediately taken as a sign of cultural imperialism in which European models are absolutized across the centuries.

In Poland, we find clear traces of the transformations in mentality in the polemics surrounding the charitable initiatives of Jerzy Owsiak. Those polemics reflect a conflict between the classical conception of altruism, in which the performance of good acts was something noble and sublime, and the postmodernist style dominated by carelessness, the spirit of the moment, and being cool. His style of operation has many of the features characteristic of the postmodern mentality, in which the popular television program replaces the lecture in metaphysics and the rock concert is regarded as a practical introduction both to aesthetics and to social philosophy. The variety of evaluations formulated in that context illustrates one of the many mechanisms which function in a pluralistic society and evoke many emotions. They teach respect for varied styles as we look with nostalgia on familiar models which already seem to the younger generation to be too sublime.

The Humanistic Dialogue with Culture

It would be an impermissible oversimplification to connect the transmission of the Gospel exclusively with the classical tradition in culture or in philosophy. In the dialogue with the contemporary world, Christianity finds new ways of passing on the evangelical truth. Both the chorale of Bach and rock music can, for different audiences, be effective forms of passing on the Gospel. We cannot, as lovers of Mozart, treat appreciation of his music as an absolutely necessary condition for salvation if for no other reason than because the Church carried out its salvific mission for eighteen centuries without appeal to the monumental beauty of his music. The absolutization of forms, which are supposed to serve the revelation of content, would be anti-evangelical. Therefore the conceptual forms familiar to postmodernism and its characteristic affirmation of freedom can be used to transmit the timeless truths which must reach contemporary circles formed under the influence of postmodernism; the distinctive features of that school can show the essence of the truths fundamental to Christianity. In that perspective, freedom is connected to responsibility in order to seek new models of spirituality, conceptually familiar to a generation which has gone through the experience of disappointment with the legacy of modernity.

The postulate advanced above does not mean that we have to take seriously each proposal offered as an expression of postmodernist spirituality. Elementary principles of rational criticism do not allow one to take seriously the search for an esoteric Christianity in which elements of magic or *gnosis* are combined with a lack of elementary intellectual responsibility. Nor do they allow one to raise New Age thought to the level of a contemporary spirituality. John Paul II had no illusions about the value of New Age thought, when he wrote:

> It is only a new way of practicing Gnosticism—that attitude of the spirit that, in the name of a profound knowledge of God, results in distorting His World and replacing it with purely human words.[22]

Not every play of associations in which the word "spirituality" appears can therefore be treated as an expression of the search for a spirituality characteristic of postmodernity. At the same time, however, the use of postmodernist categories itself does not discredit particular proposals as incompatible with Christian thought.

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22 John Paul II, *Crossing the Threshold of Hope*, trans. Jenny McPhee and Martha McPhee (New York: Knopf, 1994), 90.

In the house of our Father there are many mansions. The truth of the Gospel was preached for a long time in an environment which did not know either a chorale of Bach or the philosophical work of the Aristotelians. Though it is difficult to regard the undermining of that work as an accomplishment, it is necessary to take account of the reality of present and future cultural transformations. In these, the dominant role may be played by those for whom the work of the great creators of European culture will turn out to be foreign, or even of little importance. We may not rule out dialogue with such people in advance. When, twenty centuries ago, the Apostles reached the continent of Europe, they did not impose upon Europe the cultural legacy of Judaism, but were able to distinguish between that which was congenial and familiar and that which was universal and essential. In that style, one's concern is about the evidence of evangelical love and truth in a world which experiences deep crises and transformations.

The Humanism of the Gospel

In the complicated realities of the contemporary world we must create culture, acting with all the richness of our being and with the fullness of a personality formed by the Gospel and by grace. In the crush of words and images, there is a general need for evidence of a life based on the principles of the Christian faith. Such a life can fascinate and lead into a world of values to which words alone cannot lead. The logic of love turns out to be stronger than the simple logic of syllogisms. Saints are able to transmit a content which speakers can never transmit because saints speak to us not in the prose of declarations but in the poetry of evangelical love, which radiates with Divine beauty. Living in this world, they remain a sign of values from another. What they transmit can give rise to unease and spark controversies, but our culture would be impoverished and deprived of a depth dimension if it lacked any evidence of the radicalism of the saints. This is a sign of contradiction in the face of attitudes which place easy self-satisfaction, mediocrity, and superficiality on a pedestal. The radicalism of the Gospel offers an explicit choice between heroism and mediocrity.

The personal connection between the divine Absolute and a contingent human nature, with its well-known limits and its bodily weaknesses, bears witness to the fact that Christianity cannot ignore that which is contingent, transitory, and fragile. In the search for new Heavens, the factor of grace must saturate that which is natural. Mutable cultural elements must be filled with the immutable, transcendent reality of a God close to man, coming in various cultures and times in order to save us. The salvific act is accomplished in the context of a great integration in which it is impossible to lack the splendor of beauty.

That *splendor pulchri*, like the *veritatis splendor*, is often not noticed by contemporary civilization as it experiences the drama of an extraordinary rush of events. Maintaining aesthetic sensitivity to the radiance of beauty is a requirement for an integral humanism. Its completion requires an integral formation of the person made possible by the appeal to evangelical principles and values. Amid changing realities it is possible by new means to carry on the eternal mission of the Church so that, amid the realities of daily life, the shadow of ugliness and primitivism does not overcome the splendor of beauty. The threat to humanistic values has already occurred in various times and forms to which the Christian answer has been a consistent cultivation of the values and meaning inspired by the axiology of the Gospel.

V. DIALOGUE BETWEEN SYSTEMS AS AN ILLUSION OF THE CONTEMPORARY WORLD?

The Defense of Relativism

The enthusiasm of earlier declarations about the death of God contrasts sharply with the mood found in commentaries about the death of the human person and about the radical change of the horizon of meaning and truth. In circles under the intellectual influence of Derrida and Lyotard, there gradually grew a lack of trust in reason and a skeptical evaluation of the possibility of a dialogue in which the world of elementary human values is discovered. In place of substantive arguments and rational deductions there is an idle game of associations, analogies and metaphors, irony and distance. All of this allows attention in academic research to aspects which were ignored in the period of the scientistic fascination with a rational inquiry subordinated to exact methodological procedures. Some of the critics of modernity suggested even that farce and pastiche are the fundamental forms of academic activity which take into consideration the epistemological rules of deconstructionism.

The acceptance of such an epistemology is not only an expression of aversion toward the work of contemporary philosophy of science, but also signifies a programmatic regress toward a methodology prior to modern science. In that premodern period, in search of an ideal *scientiae universalis* an attempt was made to combine the elements of mathematics with poetry, and myth with common-sense physics. Its deficiencies are recognized by the most enthusiastic deconstructionists. For example, Bruno Latour, in celebrating the simplicity of the one-dimensional picture of science proposed by the Edinburgh School, notes some of the consequences of the rejection of rationality as classically understood. He concludes nihilistically that after postmodernism there is nowhere else to go; "it brings to a close the whole modern enterprise."[1]

The practical consequence of such an approach is a questioning of the fundamental truths considered unquestionable in the rational tradition of the Enlightenment. Thus the radical supporters of postmodernism question not only the traditional concept of human nature, but also the conception of universal human rights. They hold that traditional universalism should now be replaced by an ethnocentrism in

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1 Bruno Latour, "One More Turn after the Social Turn," in Ernan McMullin, ed., *The Social Dimensions of Science* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1992), 291.

which relativism will take into account the distinctive features of local cultures, of races, of a particular gender, or of an active minority.[2] On that view, classical concepts are manifestations of a totalitarianism in which use is made of language, logic, and rationality as sources of oppression of particular (intellectual) minorities.

A Rainbow in Place of Logic?

The disappointments brought by the twentieth century no longer allow one to cultivate the most optimistic variants of an earlier faith in reason, in the achievements of science and technology, in the objective meaning of history, and in the community of the human family. This leads to the questioning of many concrete values to which earlier generations ascribed an objective, universal, and absolute character, i.e., one independent of the effects of time, environment, and culture. According to deconstructive postmodernism, the recognition of any context-transcending values is supposed to be a manifestation of an authoritarian approach in which the totalitarianism of language and reason leads to a defense of objectivism, both in axiology and in ethics.[3]

On the new view, the only justified reaction to the liberation from Enlightenment illusions has to be the affirmation of a pluralism which recognizes both the quantity of existential situations irreducible to one another and the soundness of mutually exclusive evaluations of those same situations in various cultural traditions. By reference to the various elements of the contemporary cultural situation, we obtain versions of moral relativism which are formally different, but similar in content. Zygmunt Bauman, in his attempt to combine situationism and relativism with contemporary cultural pluralism develops his own poetics of the postmodern condition of man, writing:

> In the part of the world where it celebrated its greatest triumphs, modernity has learned … to live with its own impossibility. Not just the black, but all colors are now beautiful, and they are allowed to boast their beauty together, though each sort of beauty is unlike the next. This may not yet be a rainbow *coalition*, but this

2 See Deal W. Hudson, "Human Nature, Human Rights, and the Crisis among Western Intellectuals," *Notes and Documents* 38 (December 1993): 31.

3 A penetrating critique of this position from the point of view of Christian thought is presented by Mortimer J. Adler in his *Haves without Have-nots: Essays for the 21st Century on Democracy and Socialism* (New York: Macmillan, 1991) and *The Difference in Man and the Difference it Makes* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1993).

> certainly is a rainbow *coexistence*. And thus is a rainbow-like, polysemic, and manifold culture, unashamedly ambiguous, reticent in passing judgments, perforce tolerant to others ….[4]

The question arises: Can the characteristic of the "manifold culture" presented by Bauman be objectively grounded, and not only at the level of common sense generalities, but also in insightful analyses based on logical connectives? Do such logical connections fail to apply? Is it necessary to recognize the postmodernist descriptions of contemporary culture, including the evaluation of rationality and ethics, as only a manifestation of essayistic rhetoric? The latter can even seem suggestive as long as elementary distinctions between emotional persuasion and rationally justified argument are not introduced.

A Monologue in Place of Truth?

The vision of cultural pluralism accepted in populist postmodernism leads to a disturbing conception of man as a monologic being unavoidably condemned to imprisonment in the cave of his own cultural tradition: There are no universal principles of reason that would allow the elaboration of a compromise metacultural narrative. There is no common metatruth, and the very concept of truth can lead either to the application of repression and violence or to the muzzling of independent circles which reject the classical theory of rationality.[5] The exchange of information is supposed to be possible only within communities which speak the same language and which accept the same hierarchy of values. Consequently supracultural dialogue is not possible and the very concept of dialogue must be recognized as a grand illusion, which dominated modernity but has not been definitively rejected.

Since the postmodernists have always maintained the monologic character of all discussions, they should not try to convince representatives of other systems of the correctness of postmodernism. Their practice, however, shows that they believe in some kind of minimal dialogue and that they accept the suprasystemic character of certain values. Zygmunt Bauman seems to treat both tolerance and solidarity as absolute values which should be recognized in any type of suprasystemic discussion. Lyotard affirms that social justice is a suprasystemic value. It required that Americans leave Viet Nam and the

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4 Zygmunt Bauman, *Modernity and Ambivalence* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), 159.

5 Cf. Józef Życiński, "Knebel odpowiedalności czy dyktatura prawdy?" *Więź* 436 (1995): 161–163.

French, Algeria. Though he recognizes that he cannot justify that truth in a rational way, he considers it to be "transcendent" knowledge.[6] Many other representatives of that approach drown in inconsistencies as they try to determine whether the liberation of minorities and war against totalitarianism must be treated as absolute values.

We find the most disturbing expression of epistemological irrationalism in the position of Lyotard himself, when he announces that certain truths of fundamental importance can be completely inaccessible to reason and, despite that, be known as truths by people gifted with the ability to transcend their situationo-cultural conditions. Such an epistemology introduces into our knowledge an element of secret truth accessible only to chosen individuals but incapable of rational justification.

Those misgivings would not arise if each cognizing subject had available the possibility of attaining "transcendent" knowledge. That would mean a revolution in epistemology, in which the place of rational reflection is taken by, for example, contemplation and mysticism. That possibility is not, however, in play because for many Frenchmen and Americans the evaluation of military actions in Algeria and Viet Nam is, even today, far from being as unequivocal as Lyotard thinks they should be. Thus one must consistently distinguish a privileged class of thinkers who discover truths inaccessible to human reason. That could mean either the rehabilitation of the guru or a new appreciation of the myth of a guiding force—this time about a guiding force in epistemology.

From the time Michael Polanyi published *Personal Knowledge*,[7] it has been widely accepted that our knowledge also includes truths discovered in a non-rational, and sometimes even a non-conceptual, way. When, however, one tries in this way to introduce theses concerning problems of central importance, there is no reason why one cannot add other, controversial statements which, for some thinkers, appear to be as obvious and certain as does the evaluation of the Viet Nam War for Lyotard. The defender of an absolute ethics could then argue that, thanks to his capacity for "transcendence," he recognizes fundamental moral principles as much more obvious than the evaluation of the moral aspects of the Viet Nam War. From the intellectual perspective suggested by Lyotard, such discussion will be

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6 Jean-François Lyotard and Jean-Loup Thébaud, *Just Gaming*, trans. Wlad Godzich (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985), 69 ff. Lyotard does not take the trouble to define more precisely on what depends the transcendence of reason and the transition to certainty by the formulation of theses which cannot be rationally justified.

7 Michael Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge: Towards a Post-Critical Philosophy*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958).

irresolvable, since it is not possible to point to any criteria for deciding which of the evaluations discovered by the method of "transcendence" to recognize as absolutely unquestionable.

The Imperialism of Epistemology?

The intellectual development of humanity depended on perfecting the conceptual tools and on the development of rational methods of inquiry to facilitate the discovery of the truth. However, deconstructive postmodernism suggests that science and technology as well as language and culture can turn out to be means of enslavement and repression. The particular threat of totalitarianism arises both from universal logical principles and the system of religious monotheism.[8] In these evaluations totalitarianism is usually presented as an absolute negative value. Such an evaluation seems to conflict with the logical principle of non-contradiction, which plays a fundamental role in science as classically understood.

In the postmodernist critique, science, with its theories and discoveries, is a form of myth expressing the interests and needs of a given cultural community. Postmodernists avoid the question of why certain myths turn out to be technologically useful, making it possible to construct on their basis rockets and computers, while other myths, for example about a classless society or a chosen race, have been able to function socially only in support of police methods. In postmodernism, those very important differences are not simply ignored, but are rather minimized. Writing about the relation of Communism to capitalism, Bauman omits the question of the violation of human rights, limiting himself to the simple assertion that:

> The communist modernizing adventure shared in all the inner incongruities of modernity in general; to its general weakness, it added absurdities and hardships of its own making.[9]

On the view proposed, the totalitarian trampling on elementary human dignity appears as the sum of a collection of general and particular nonsense. Could a consistent postmodernist could go further and undertake a moral evaluation of Communistic totalitarianism? Because it is not possible to formulate suprasystemic evaluations and no set of universal values is recognized, the consistent postmodernist can at

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8 Cf. G. Baum, "Critical Theology: Replies to Ray Morrow," in his *Essays in Critical Theology* (Kansas City: Sheed & Ward, 1994), 17.

9 Bauman, op. cit., 268.

most appeal to his personal ability to transcend the system, in order to formulate evaluations which could not be justified in a rational way. Subjectivism and irrationalism would, on this view, have the form of those interpretative paradigms which have been given an unequivocally negative evaluation in the history of human thought. At present, however, it is possible to find an apotheosis of such interpretative models. For example, Aleksandr Zinoviev, highly regarded for his work on the logic of science, argued in many of the lectures he gave in the 1970's that the moral evaluation of Communism and the mentality characteristic of *Homo sovieticus* can be developed only by members of a Communist society; any attempt to make a suprasystemic evaluation of Marxist totalitarianism was supposed unsound.

In the development of philosophical thought, equally explicit evaluations have been formulated in monologic systems in which the possibility or the point of suprasystemic dialogue has been questioned. The thesis of the non-existence of any ultimate truths and the undermining of the conception of absolute truth has, itself, been treated as an ultimate truth. A consistent treatment of that thesis leads to rhetoric in place of rational analysis and replaces dialogue with monologue. Such philosophical proposals stand in contradiction to the practice of those trends in contemporary philosophy in which intersystemic dialogue, with its well-known limitations and conditions, is treated as one of the most important proposals of contemporary thought.[10] The avoidance of statements about interdisciplinary dialogue becomes an expression of political correctness in epistemology. If there can be no real dialogue, then only conversation is possible; to define its features more clearly one can state that it is a monologic conversation.

The Incommensurability of Systems and the Relativity of Values

Both objective values and universal principles of ethics are seen by deconstructive postmodernism as a utopia because there is no possibility of conducting a suprasystemic dialogue in which it would be possible to achieve a consensus at the level of metalinguistic agreement. That impossibility is supposed to be the result of the incommensurability of interpretations presented in distinct cultural circles. The concept of the incommensurability of theories was popularized in the philosophy of science in the work of Thomas Kuhn and Paul Feyerabend. When, however, after a period of lively polemics

10 Cf., for example, Francis Jacques, *Dialogiques: recherches logiques sur le dialogue* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1979) and *L'espace logique de l'interlocution: dialogiques II* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1985).

in the philosophy of science, it became obvious that it is not possible to link that concept to the ideological content with which it was at first associated, the attempt to introduce that content continued among philosophers of culture, representatives of the social sciences, and the professional critics of modernity.

Before postmodernists made use of the thesis that content belonging to two different paradigms is mutually untranslatable or even incomparable, that thesis was developed in a similar spirit by radical representatives of the social sciences. Ronald Sukenick, among others, on its basis questioned the possibility of the knowledge of objective reality, stating:

> all versions of 'reality,' are of the nature of fiction. There's your story and my story, there's the journalist's story and the historian's story, there's the philosopher's story and the scientist's story … [our common world] is only a description. … Reality is imagined.[11]

A self-reflexive application of Sukenick's argumentation would authorize one to say that the opinion presented has a fictional character, being only one of many attempts to describe reality, all of which are predestined to fail. Sukenick's arguments questioning the existence of objective reality have the same value as do the arguments of the postmodernists questioning the absolute and objective character of values and moral norms. In those arguments, a major role is played by connecting Kuhn's incommensurability thesis with views which were foreign to the creator of that thesis.

Kuhn himself writes explicitly about this, opposing the joining of a strong ontological commentary to his position. In an article entitled "Theory-Change as Structure Change: Comments on the Sneed Formalism," Kuhn writes:

> In applying the term "incommensurability" to theories, I had intended only to insist that there was no common language within which both could be fully expressed and which could therefore be used in a point-by-point comparison between them.[12]

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11 Ronald Sukenick, "Upward and Juanward," in Daniel C. Noel, ed., *Seeing Castañeda: Reactions to the "Don Juan" Writings of Carlos Castañeda* (New York: Putnam, 1976), 113.

12 Thomas Kuhn, "Theory-Change as Structure Change: Comments on the Sneed Formalism," *Erkenntnis* 10 (1976): 191–192.

Whether such a common language can be elaborated for many comparable theories remains an open question. One can agree that in the language of the torturer, texts about the dignity of man and about fidelity to himself and to principles would turn out to be texts deprived of any meaning. Symmetrically, the arguments of the torturer justifying his moral primitivism may turn out to be completely incomprehensible at many points to the victims who are suffering because of that primitivism. That does not, however, justify any connection to an ideology in which it is asserted that the moral values accepted by the torturer and his victim are equally good on account of their incommensurability and on account of the impossibility of appeal in evaluations to objective criteria independent of the paradigm accepted.

In the article just cited, Kuhn also protests against the identification of incommensurability with incomparability. Defenders of relativism who appeal to his work attempt to maintain that all views are equally valid and incomparable, and that it is not possible to assert anything with certainty, whereas Kuhn emphasizes that he borrowed the term "incommensurability" from mathematics. For example, the diagonal of a square and its side are incommensurable since there is no unit of measurement which can directly and exactly state the measure of the segment in both cases. That does not mean, however, that we cannot even say that the diagonal is longer than the side. Nevertheless, postmodernist defenders of relativism attempt to interpret Kuhn in the very way that Kuhn rejects, i.e., as excluding the possibility of suprasystemic dialogue.

Feyerabend uses the term "incommensurability" in a sense different from that of Kuhn. In the analysis of his texts, one can distinguish at least three different concepts of incommensurability. In the primary sense, the author of *Against Method* emphasizes that the incommensurability of theories belonging to different paradigms manifests itself in the fact that the fundamental concepts of those theories cannot be compared with respect to content by appeal to a relation of inclusion, exclusion, or disjunction. Feyerabend admits, however, that anyone who enters the marshland of incommensurability will come out with a head full of mud.[13] Commenting on that remark, Richard Bernstein adds only that Feyerabend himself is no exception to this rule, because—despite the greater precision of his statements—in various contexts he gives the term "incommensurability" completely

13 Paul Feyerabend, "Against Method," *British Journal for the Philosophy of Science* 28 (1977): 363.

different meanings.[14] Bernstein adds a more interesting remark to the effect that various content is connected to the concept of the human "I" in Morocco, Bali, and Japan. However, it does not follow that representatives of those three different cultures would not be able to understand one another in statements in which the pronoun "I" or its counterparts appear.[15] The blurring of the differences between difficulties and impossibility signifies the introduction of rhetoric in the place of logic.

Appeal to the contemporary rejection of grand narratives, to the mutual contradictions between them, to the limitations of reason, etc. are also the result of misunderstandings. The most important limitations on rational discourse revealed in the so-called limitation theorems, were recognized in the 1920's and 1930's. The year 1951 is considered to be the symbolic date of the death of logical positivism, in which an attempt was still being made to develop the apotheosis of an illusory science. Already in the nineteenth century it was well-known that there is no way to defend Voltaire's thesis that "There is only one morality, just as there is only one geometry"[16] since, along with the emergence of non-Euclidean geometries arose the possibility of constructing infinitely many systems of geometry. The followers of Lyotard noticed all these phenomena relatively late and attached to them a commentary lacking substantive justification. There is no objective basis for affirming that one grand narrative directed the life of humanity at any particular stage of its development. On the contrary, the familiar evidence of conflicts of values testifies to the mutual limitations of various interpretations accepted within one and the same vision of the world.

Monologue, Dialogue, *Ethos*

One of the central questions which must be directed to the radical proposals for a departure from the modern intellectual tradition is: In what way can a society function when values and moral norms are relativized to particular groups and express the interests and convictions of those groups? Traditional answers to that question appeal either to objective values or to social agreement. If, however, we accept the idea that objective values do not exist, then the search for agreement is a Sisyphean project. Since it is not possible to carry on a dialogue

14 Richard J. Bernstein, *Beyond Objectivism and Relativism: Science, Hermeneutics, and Praxis* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1983), 79 ff.

15 Ibid., 96.

16 "Morality," in *A Philosophical Dictionary* (1764).

between the representatives of different systems, what remains is only rhetoric and persuasion.

The Polish bishops gave a skeptical evaluation of that view in their message on the role of social dialogue in the conditions of building the structures of a democratic government. We read there, that for Christians the variant of relativism in which

> the possibility of ascribing an absolute character to the evaluations of a totalitarian system or of recognizing the objective superiority of democratic systems over dictatorships practically disappears. We would not then be able explicitly to condemn genocide inspired by fanaticism, the opinions of the victims of torture would have the same value as the opinions of their torturers, and fascism and other forms of totalitarianism would have to be recognized as views no worse than democracy. Such an approach would not allow a defense of human rights, struggle for justice or rushing to the aid of the suffering since all the values just mentioned would have to be recognized as relative.
>
> A forthright recognition of pluralism as a feature of contemporary societies does not, therefore, mean an easy approval of all mutually exclusive views. It is impossible simultaneously to approve peace and violence, love and hatred, dialogue and fanaticism. In the practice of modern democracy, there is a set of values which are accepted as obvious and unquestionable. Fidelity to those values means that their recognition does not require a discussion of the permissibility of applying torture or even inquiry into public opinion about cannibalism. If such ideas were taken seriously, it would not be possible to defend humanism and to be concerned about the development of culture, since all views would be treated as equally good, including those which deny the necessity of a concern for humanism and culture.[17]

17 *Dialog, tolerancja, wartości: Orędzie biskupów polskich o potrzebie dialogu i tolerancji w warunkach budowy demokracji* (Tarnów: Biblos, 1995), 13 ff.

The Symphony of Dialogue

The pluralism of views and of cultures appears today to be an unavoidable phenomenon of culture. Differences of view appear in the evaluation of the possibility of intercultural dialogue. They are the result both of differences of position with respect to the possibility of communication between the representatives of different cultures and of differences in relation to objective truth. Pluralism does not mean renouncing truth; it sensitizes one to the complexity and difficulty of the search for truth. John Paul II teaches such an attitude, writing in his well-known letter about Christianity and contemporary culture published on the three hundredth anniversary of the publication of Newton's *Principia*:

> … the vision of the unity of all things and all peoples in Christ, … carries with it into the larger community a deep reverence for all that is, a hope and assurance that the fragile goodness, beauty and life we see in the universe is moving toward a completion and fulfillment which will not be overwhelmed by the forces of dissolution and death. This vision also provides a strong support for the values which are emerging both from our knowledge and appreciation of creation…[18]

The optimistic perspective of the Pope's vision finds its justification in the works of many theologians representative of the thought of the last century. Hans Urs von Balthasar, for example in his work *Truth is Symphonic: Aspects of Christian Pluralism*,[19] emphasizes that the depth of the boundless riches revealed in Christ cannot be satisfactorily expressed in any one system of thought and therefore requires a "symphonic" completion in many systems. The concept of a symphony refers, however, to the concept of a musical harmony. If harmony is taken to be a purely subjective creation, then one loses the possibility of saying that the music of Mozart has more value than songs for preschoolers and that the language of the great works of Henryk Sienkiewicz is objectively higher than the language of the romances of Helena Mniszkówna. It would also not be possible to accept the doctrine of human rights, since there are many cultures in which those rights are

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18 John Paul II, "Message to the Reverend George V. Coyne, S.J., Director of the Vatican Observatory, 1 June 1988," in R. Russell, W. Stoeger, G. Coyne, eds., *Physics, Philosophy and Theology. A Common Quest for Understanding* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988), M5.

19 San Francisco: Ignatius, 1987.

not recognized and as a consequence their absolutization would have to be recognized as a drift towards an imperialism of the values and norms recognized in Western civilization.

In the texts of the majority of postmodernists there often appear suprasystemic evaluations introduced in a more or less hidden way. Both when Bauman asserts that solidarity is more important than tolerance and when he prefers chaotic diversity to rational arrangement and symmetrical order, there appear in his work evaluations which are intended to be objective and suprasystemic. It is difficult to recognize as consistent a position in which certain values are depreciated until they turn out to be useful for the development of other theses in that system. Such an interpretive practice does not depend on the results of discussions about suprasystemic communication. They reveal the internal contradictions of philosophical proposals in which essayistic impressions predominate over rational discourse.

The contemporary antipathy towards the methodological principles of rationality recognized in classical epistemology results, to a large degree, from such inspirations as the critique of philosophy expressed in Adam Mickiewicz's "Romanticism" when he wrote: "Feelings and faith tell me more than the scholar's glass and eye." We find both in contemporary postmodernism and in nineteenth century Romanticism a reaction against the uncritical apotheosis of science and rationality and against the illusions which accompany it. That reaction does not, however, authorize an arbitrary apotheosis of relativism or irrationality or even a Romantic critique of the unquestionable accomplishments of the natural sciences. Despite the fact that one can encounter, in various cultures, different evaluations of the science and technology begun in the Galilean-Newtonian Revolution, it remains an absolute truth that radio-technical apparatuses and spaceships can work only on the basis of the physics initiated by that revolution; they will not work on the basis of the views of physics found in Pygmy culture or on the basis of the beliefs of the Azande. Analogically, the multitude of possible frames of reference permitted in Einstein's theory of relativity does not change the fact that, within that theory, the laws of physics do not depend on the description accepted in the given frame of reference and that for that reason they can be treated as absolute.

It would without a doubt be possible to work out a position in which a critique of the oversimplifications of the dialogues and the inadequacies of classical rationalism congenial to the spirit of postmodernism was developed in an intellectual perspective which agrees with Christian thought. There are many works, of varying degrees of radicalism and of varying quality, that tend in that

direction.[20] There are also works in which the attempt is made to ascertain the fundamental principles of ethics, taking into account the legitimate points of the critics of postmodernism.[21] The concrete shapes of the proposed new formulations are close to the interpretive proposals worked out outside of postmodernism, taking into consideration the oversimplifications and generalizations contained in the tradition that has been called "modernity." The introduction of new oversimplifications and generalizations containing an apotheosis of postmodernity in their place would, however, be a methodological misunderstanding. For the principal problem goes far beyond the question of the possibility of achieving compromise formulations combining the essence of Christianity with a critique of modernity. Gregory Baum says that, when he tried to familiarize his colleagues with the ideas of postmodernism, he was informed that those ideas are a set of purely academic questions lacking any relevance to the practical problems which life brings.[22] The problem is that, most often, those academic questions are from a half-century ago. Over the years, they have engaged the passions of an academic community asking about the limits of rationality and the consequences of interpretative pluralism. Now, that community is already engaged with other problems. Therefore it would be a misunderstanding to treat postmodernist reflection on contemporary culture as normative-methodological prescriptions for the representatives of the natural sciences. Those sciences made great progress when Galileo and Newton worked out research methods independent of humanistic rhetoric.

Postmodernist commentaries in which an attempt is made to apply to the natural sciences the procedures which are sometimes applied in the social sciences create the impression of a monologue in which burlesque replaces communication at the level of elementary meaning. They have already provoked the reaction of scientists, who have begun to parody the publication style characteristic of thinkers associated with the fundamental ideas of contemporary postmodernism. There thus appeared works which revealed an ignorance of the elementary concepts of the natural sciences in works by Gilles Deleuze,

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20 Cf. J. Breech, *Jesus and Postmodernism* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989); John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990); and D. Allen, *Christian Belief in a Postmodern World* (Westminster: John Knox Press, 1989).

21 Cf. Antonino Franco, *Prospettive etiche nella postmodernità* (Cinisello Balsamo (Milano): San Paolo, 1994), 9–16; S. Latora, "La ripresa del primato dell'etica nella filosofia postmoderna," in ibid., 123–130.

22 G. Baum, "Critical Theology," 15.

Jean Baudrillard, Jacques Lacan, and Bruno Latour.[23] The pastiche written by the American physicist Alan D. Sokal has become particularly well-known. In 1996, Sokal published in the pages of the well-known journal *Social Text* an article which was a programmatic parody of the style of postmodernist publications.[24] The article was intended as a collection of nonsense in which the existence of objective reality was questioned, blatantly absurd assertions were backed up with a rich bibliography, and a commentary on the liberating role of feminism and on Catalonian nationalism was formulated against a background of considerations from Einstein's Theory of Relativity. The very fact that the editors of *Social Text* published the article is evidence of the depth of the crisis which the academic circles which have renounced the classical conception of rationality and traditional epistemological distinctions are now experiencing. The fact that the representatives of the editorial board were not able to distinguish between sense and nonsense does not, however, authorize the conclusion that science as classically understood is absurd.

23 Cf. Alan D. Sokal and Jean Bricmont, *Fashionable Nonsense: Postmodern Intellectuals' Abuse of Science* (New York: Picador USA, 1998).

24 Alan D. Sokal, "Transgressing the Boundaries: Toward a Transformative Hermeneutics of Quantum Gravity," *Social Text* 46/47 (1996): 217–252. Republished in Sokal and Bricmont.

VI. THE POSTMODERNIST CONCEPTION OF TRUTH

> You know nothing of this truth,
> and will never know anything
> of it.
>
> —J.-F. Lyotard,
> *Libidinal Economy*

If the representatives of postmodernism limited themselves only to indicating new versions of the perplexity of Pilate when considering the definition of truth, their work would not evoke opposition. Epistemological agnosticism can be an expression of a cultural attitude the causes of which are easy to explain. The problem is that Lyotard rounds out his skepticism about the possibility of knowing the truth with an ideological commentary in which he calls for a war against "the white terror of truth," which is supposed to be "the weapon of paranoia and power."[1] Proposals for a war which runs ahead of reflection have been formulated before, for example in Marxism. It is hard to say that such a strategy turned out to be valuable in effecting the social and cultural transformations of the last century. Therefore, one should be particularly wary of contemporary proposals which use the rhetoric of war in their attempt to reform the world, but without first taking the trouble to understand it.

Philosophizing after the Death of Truth?

The classical position of cognitive realism is expressed in the thesis that our knowledge provides an objective truth understood as a correspondence with objective reality. Successive critiques in epistemology led first to the postmodernist questioning of the concept of objective reality and to its recognition as an illusory product of fantasy. In turn, statements to the effect that our cognitive powers can provide objective truth, either in the field of philosophy or in the particular sciences, were questioned and recognized as too optimistic. The position of Lyotard should not be taken as valid for all versions of postmodernism. Its main conclusions concur with the critique of the classical concept of truth worked out in the pragmatist postmodernism of Richard Rorty. Many supporters of postmodernism try nevertheless to

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1 Jean-François Lyotard, *Libidinal Economy*, trans. Iain Hamilton Grant (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), 241.

criticize the correspondence theory of truth in a more careful way. Their intentions are expressed by J. Wentzel van Huyssteen as follows:

> For "pre-postmodernists" it apparently seems less complicated to strive for truth, to distinguish between right and wrong interpretations of the biblical text and true and false propositions, and to maintain some form of objective moral truth. In a postmodern world, however, we worry about efforts to plan and build one world, one conversation for humankind, one story of humanity.[2]

Van Huyssteen himself recognizes the possibility of a postmodernist philosophy of science which does not appeal to any grand theoretical narratives in order to justify the scientific procedures applied, but only investigates the socio-cultural causes of the development of science.[3] His views are not shared by many other authors. Their position is expressed, for example, by Zuzana Parusnikova, who gives a negative answer to the question posed in the title of her essay "Is a Postmodernist Philosophy of Science Possible?"[4] She questions the possibility of a philosophy of science as classically understood, asserting that the discourse of particular scientific disciplines cannot be contained in a single narrative. In the context of the vision associated with the thought of Lyotard, a so-called philosophy of science could, in the best case, exist as an ironic conversation about science. In the perspectives of the deconstructionist vision of science, similar to the views of Foucault, Lacan, Deleuze, and Derrida, the literary construction of philosophical texts destroys the univocal character of scientific formulations and makes impossible the conduct of a philosophy of science as classically understood.[5] As a result, it is necessary to give up both the classical concept of truth and the traditional expectations that philosophy and science can provide knowledge of objective reality. As the greatest effort at justification of such an attitude was made by Richard Rorty, it is worthwhile to consider his views on this question.

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2 J. Wentzel van Huyssteen, *Essays in Postfoundationalist Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 278.

3 Ibid., 268 ff.

4 *Studies in History and Philosophy of Science* 23 (1992): 1: 36.

5 Ibid., 31–37.

Rorty's Neo-Pragmatism

As early as 1991, Rorty characterized his position as "postmodernist bourgeois liberalism,"[6] in order to distance himself from postmodernism in his essays about Heidegger.[7] Independent of the evolution of his evaluation of the connections between pragmatism and postmodernism, what strikes one in those views is their similarity to postmodernism's characteristic evaluations of contemporary culture as well as a clear movement in the direction of a neo-pragmatist Americanization of contemporary European thought.[8] The fundamental thesis uniting the disciples of Lyotard and Rorty is the agreement that "there is no such thing as 'first philosophy'—neither metaphysics, nor philosophy of language, nor philosophy of science."[9] The author of that declaration tries subsequently to justify the extremely anti-metaphysical character of his version of pragmatism, by appealing to the process of the progressive secularization of culture. He writes:

> The postmetaphysical intellectual climate gradually develops over the course of the several remaining centuries along with the secularization of thought. … Metaphysical culture is the secularized substitute for a certain version of religious culture, where scientists have taken the place of chaplains. If the metaphysical culture is eliminated and replaced with pragmatist culture, it will not lead to any sudden changes in the field of morality, politics, taste, or anything else.[10]

The radicalism of such evaluations is all the more influential in academic circles since Rorty is respected for earlier books in which he raised the important questions of classical philosophy. In his recent works he refers only rarely to his earlier books. He nevertheless changes the language of discourse, taking into consideration linguistic and interpretive schemata similar to those of American liberals. Opinions which were not long ago defended by the radical clientele of Bohemian

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6 R. Rorty, "Postmodernist Bourgeois Liberalism," in ORT, 197–202.

7 R. Rorty, *Essays on Heidegger and Others* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 1.

8 Cf. Giuseppe Riconda, "Riflessioni su alcune proposte interpretative del pragmatismo," in Piero Coda and Graziano Lingua, eds., *Esperienza e libertà* (Roma: Città Nuova, 2000), 173.

9 CIS, 55.

10 Richard Rorty, "Filozofia pasożytuje na wyobraźni poetyckiej," in Bronisław Wildstein, *Profile wieku* (Warsaw: Politeja, 2000), 146.

coffeehouses today find their defenders in an author who is thoroughly familiar with the works of the classical authors of metaphysics. Making an attempt to interpret the tensions characteristic of contemporary culture, he develops a polemic between the liberal ironist and the classic metaphysicist. The ironist is the symbol of liberation, the metaphysicist—a black character.

On the view which Rorty currently accepts, the very possibility of making sharp distinctions between the subjective and the objective and between the description of facts and sets of values is put into question. Clark Glymour, in his critique of such an approach, called it "new fuzziness." That characterization refers to the blurring of the fundamental concepts and distinctions of classical epistemology. Authors invoking the authority of Thomas Kuhn and the ideas contained in *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*[11] in justification of their radical theses have wanted to give their position the name "left Kuhnianism." The essence of their approach is expressed in the fact that, in place of the epistemological concept of truth, they introduce the sociological conception of consensus. In place of objective truth we get unforced consensus. To the skeptical question of the epistemologists: "agreement among whom?" comes the sarcastic answer: among ourselves.[12]

That leads to well-understood resistance when the sociological category of "what is ours" appears in place of the rational categories worked out in classical epistemology. Rorty himself admits that such a formulation leads to ethnocentrism in the theory of truth, but attempts to neutralize the consequences of that approach, saying that it is impossible to work out a transcendental point of reference and it is possible only to broaden the circle of persons to whom the term "we" applies by taking into consideration the convictions of the representatives of other cultures and different centers of consensus. On that view, "an intellectual virtue called 'rationality'"[13] is seen as a metaphysical relic of traditional epistemology. The main role in the recognition of certain ideas as true is played by psycho-social factors: respect for the opinions of one's colleagues, enthusiasm, curiosity about and personal interests in new ideas, and above all "the habits of relying on persuasion rather than force."[14] The unforced consensus of scientists authorizes one to treat the process of scientific research as an expression of academic solidarity since the opinion of those academics changes over the course of time. In

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11 Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970).

12 Ibid., "Science as Solidarity," in ORT, 38.

13 Ibid., 39.

14 Ibid., 39.

place of the slogan *plus ratio quam vis*, which for centuries has inspired the scientific work of the Jagiellonian University in Cracow, is now proposed the principle *plus persuasio quam ratio*, with the explanation that so-called *ratio* is only a product of the collective imagination, without any counterpart in reality.

Rorty seems to repeat, following Davidson, that

> notions like 'how things are' or 'the world' (and, *a fortiori*, truth defined as 'correspondence to the world') cannot explain anything because each of these is 'an empty notion of something completely unspecified and unspecifiable.'[15]

Critics of the conception of truth accepted in radical pragmatism go so far as to make the accusation that its consequence is a relativism in which it is not possible to consider theses of fundamental significance for our culture, for ethics, and for social philosophy to be objectively justified. Since an unforced consensus is the final criterion of the value of particular views, then there is no reason to consider Hitler's conception of the extermination of the Jews to be immoral or the Marxist theory of class warfare to be false. The only admissible assertion would be that, in the circumscribed social conditions of Nazi Germany, theses about the necessity of the extermination of the Jews enjoyed acceptance by a social majority and that the idea of class warfare fascinated people's minds, at least when the ideas were not forced on people by administrative measures.

Rorty defends himself against such a critique, maintaining that

> There is no way to beat totalitarians in argument … and no point in pretending that a common human nature makes the totalitarians unconsciously hold such premises.[16]

Formulating the problem in that way, he blurs the important distinction between the truth of particular ideas and the moral quality of the actions that correspond to them, on the one hand, and the pragmatics of convincing others to accept particular views. In the latter, an important role is played by psychological, socio-technical, and even rhetorical factors. For a discussion of the epistemological status of truth, at least in the classical formulation of that problem, it is not important whether all

15 Rorty, "Is Natural Science a Natural Kind?" in ORT, 55.

16 "Science as Solidarity," in ORT, 42.

the supporters of Nazism allowed themselves to be convinced of the necessity of respect for the Jewish community.

In thought experiments, one can imagine a situation in which an unforced consensus achieves a majority of votes by a group of social radicals on an isolated island. They decide by majority vote that the Jews have a pernicious influence on social life and that it is necessary to create a ghetto for them in order to limit their negative influence on society. Rorty oversimplifies the problem when he tries to reduce it to the question: What should one do to convince the supporters of such a practice that their views are wrong? The question of the pragmatics of possible persuasion is a secondary question, one at the level of the didactics of the justification of one's arguments. The fundamental factor is that we find in those proposals a false anthropology and an immoral social philosophy. On the basis of what "objective" criteria do we recognize those views as false, once the truth of judgments and the moral evaluation of behavior are seen as relics of an obsolete epistemology?

Probably the supporters of radical pragmatism would recommend that the ethnocentric "we," being the subject of a consensus, be extended maximally to other social groups beyond the terrain of the island on which agreement was secured. That suggestion, however, leads logically to a general referendum put to all humanity; the problem will arise in what direction that extension should be made. That is not a trivial question if we take into consideration that anti-Semitic attitudes appeared at various periods in environments which differed from one another in their cultural views in important ways. Pragmatists emphasize, to be sure, that one cannot formulate the problem ahistorically and that the thesis about the superiority of liberalism over totalitarianism is uncontroversial for the contemporary mentality and that consequently we can introduce a critique of anti-Semitic ideology. The problem is that in such a formulation we understand "contemporary mentality" as the convictions shared by educated representatives of Western culture. For the ordinary inhabitant of Madagascar, Alaska, or New Guinea, neither the thesis about the superiority of liberalism over anything else nor our critique of anti-Semitism would necessarily even have to be clear. For when we renounce epistemological categories, we are threatened with a fall into a cultural imperialism in which we will treat the set of opinions dominant in our cultural environment as the result of a representative consensus, disregarding the extremely different opinions dominant in other cultures.

Perhaps, despite the numerical preponderance of developing nations, a consensus about the immoral character of anti-Semitism would prevail in a general referendum for all humanity. Perhaps a condemnation of Nazism and Stalinism would still be possible, even if

only by a small number of votes cast by the citizens of Florida, as took place in the American presidential elections of November 2000. It would, however, be a strange intellectual perspective in which anti-Semitism was rejected only because 50.01% of the voters thought that it had to be rejected. The world of man is a world of values and of moral principles, of metaphysics and of epistemology. To reduce the richness of that world to the level of pragmatic regulations and the counting of votes means essentially to carry out an amputation on that great cultural tradition which includes the noblest accomplishments of the species *Homo sapiens*.

Homo Pragmaticus?

Taking into consideration the various attempts to depart from the classical conception of truth and to question the cognitive powers of human reason, in the encyclical *Faith and Reason* John Paul II appeals to

> philosophers—be they Christian or not—to trust in the power of human reason and not to set themselves goals that are too modest in their philosophizing. … [I]t is necessary not to abandon the passion for ultimate truth, the eagerness to search for it or the audacity to forge new paths in the search. It is faith which stirs reason to move beyond all isolation and willingly to run risks so that it may attain whatever is beautiful, good and true.[17]

In the cultural development of humanity, a major role was played by the great questions of the theoreticians: Who am I? From where do I come and to where am I going? Why does evil exist? What awaits me after this life? It is those questions that inspired the rise of philosophy in ancient Greece. Their counterparts appeared again and again in the Vedas, in the holy books of Israel, in the poems of Homer and in the tragedies of Sophocles. It is these questions which caused an horizon of meaning sought at the cost of great intellectual effort, even when those efforts did not bring any practical return, to be the natural environment for man. Subtle distinctions worked out by succeeding generations are now being blurred amid proposals to introduce, in place both of the natural sciences and classical metaphysics, a new rhetoric, which

17 FeR, ¶56.

> would draw more on the vocabulary of Romantic poetry and socialist politics, and less on that of Greek metaphysics, religious morality, or Enlightenment scientism.[18]

In that way, the distinction between the fine arts and the exact sciences would disappear and

> the people now called 'scientists' would no longer think of themselves as a member of a quasi-priestly order, nor would the public think of themselves as in the care of such an order.[19]

The ideas of radical pragmatism would be able to bring a departure from the classical conception of truth only when—in accordance with their proposed criterion of acceptability—they gain a consensus in the dominant academic institutions. Such a situation has not, at present, been reached. The representatives of prestigious institutions accuse Rorty's supporters of an embarrassing anti-intellectualism in which he promotes "terrible, deeply mistaken" views.[20] If the ideas presented were limited to the level of epistemology and the philosophy of science, then it would be possible to treat them as eccentricities lacking any influence on the research practice of science and philosophy. The supporters of postmodernist pragmatism, however, put forward many radical theses from the fields of anthropology, social philosophy, ethics, and axiology. The practical consequences of these theses are obvious. So, for example, Rorty not only speaks in favor of the possibility of constructing a lasting democracy without axiological foundations, but also considers his thesis to be unfalsifiable in the sense that no empirical data showing the impermanence of systems without axiologico-ethical foundations would be able to shake his faith in the possibility of constructing such a system. He writes:

> … the collapse of the liberal democracies would not, in itself, provide much evidence for the claim that human societies cannot survive without widely shared opinions on matters of ultimate moral importance.[21]

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18 ORT, 44.

19 Ibid.

20 Ernest Gellner, "Oświecenie: tak czy nie?" in J. Niżnik, ed., *Habermas, Rorty, Kołakowski: Stan filozofii współczesni* (Warsaw: Instytut Filozofii i Socjologii Polskiej Akademii Nauk, 1996), 112.

21 R. Rorty, "The Priority of Democracy to Philosophy," in ORT, 195.

Appealing to the authority of Dworkin and Wittgenstein, he suggests that, in situations of a conflict of social interests, one should appeal not to general ethical principles, but to social conventions and to anecdotes.[22] The exchange of anecdotes is supposed to be the model for political discourse in a democracy and the search for values and general principles by the creators of the American Constitution was the result of historical causes in which *pathos* and the feeling that they had a particular mission prevailed over the pragmatism that they really needed.

A belief in the possibility of finding a society in which everyone wants to be pragmatic and accepts principles like those of the intellectual-pragmatist remains an irrational component of views like Rorty's. Counter-examples are provided both by the student protests of 1968 and by the present demonstrations of the opponents of globalization. Every type of pragmatism can become the object of a critique as strong as that which is directed against the achievements of technology or against the foundations of the capitalist system. The motive for action does not always have to be a pragmatic consensus. It might also be simple contrariness, an emotional rejection, or a pseudo-revolutionary slogan. Discussion at that level becomes practically impossible since, by definition, it is not possible to make use of substantive arguments, and one must limit oneself to persuasion. There is a danger that, in some situations, the only effective means of persuasion would be the application of police force. That very danger concerns Michael Novak, who writes:

> If human reason is not capable of providing moral order, then decisions will be made by force. We saw this in the twentieth century. People in coffee houses debated about nihilism and Lenin, Mussolini, and Hitler brought their ideas to life, with all their consequences. Because there is no morality, there are no obstacles to keep those who attain power from using it. At that point, argument ends and there remains only naked force.[23]

As his main response to arguments that there is no way to build a lasting democracy without a basis in values and moral principles,

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22 "Postmodernist Bourgeouis Liberalism" in ORT, 201 ff.

23 Michael Novak, "Plagą naszych czasów jest nihilizm," in Wildstein, *Profile wieku*, 207.

Rorty formulates only the appeal: "Let's try!"[24] The realization of that desire leads to a view in which once again the attempt is made to justify the undertaking of experiments on all humanity. The consequences of postmodernism in anthropology are even more iconoclastic. What value does one give to the rights of a human person who finds himself outside the structures of the society which is seeking a consensus? Rorty provides an answer which is both simple and shocking:

> … on my view a child found wandering in the woods, the remnant of a slaughtered nation whose temples have been razed and whose books have been burned, has no share in human dignity. … [I]t does not follow that she may be treated like an animal. For it is part of the tradition of *our* community that the human stranger from whom all dignity has been stripped is to be taken in, to be reclothed with dignity. This Jewish and Christian element in our tradition is gratefully invoked by freeloading atheists like myself. … The existence of human rights … has as much or as little relevance to our treatment of such a child as the question of the existence of God. I think both have equally little relevance.[25]

Such a position must be recognized as consistent in relation to those of Rorty's opinions in which he saw statements about a common human nature as metaphysical relics, when he maintained that there is no metaphysically understood human nature and that the hominization of man occurs as a result of the mastery of language and of a set of social practices.[26] Striving for consistency in the presentation of his version of pragmatism, Rorty too easily omits the fact that beyond *our* ethnic community, inspired by the Judaeo-Christian vision of man, exist other communities with inspirations different from ours. The achievement in those communities of a consensus in favor of the killing of children left alive after a massacre seems extremely likely. Bourgeois liberalism, replacing classical truth with a pragmatic consensus, appears to be an (unintended) theoretical justification for a barbarism approximate versions of which have already been attempted in the history of our civilization.

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24 Richard Rorty, "Filozofia pasożytuje na wyobraźni poetyckiej," in Wildstein, *Profile wieku*, 156.

25 "Postmodernist Bourgeouis Liberalism" in ORT, 210–202.

26 Richard Rorty, "Filozofia pasożytuje na wyobraźni poetyckiej," in Wildstein, *Profile wieku*, 147.

The Lightness of Being in Epistemology

The rejection of the correspondence theory of truth, accepted in classical metaphysics, leads logically to a *pragmatic reductionism* in which all the questions of axiology, ethics, anthropology, and epistemology are reduced to the level of bureaucratic resolution of questions about the application of the institutional procedures characteristic of liberal democracy. On that view, it is still possible to write works of philosophy; that discipline is, however, understood completely differently from the way it was understood in circles under the intellectual influence of Ajdukiewicz and Ingarden. Bogdan Banasiak presents a sample of the new epistemology in his work *Filozofia "końca filozofii"* [*The Philosophy of the End of Philosophy*]. He proposes that, in our consideration of the currently influential works of Derrida and Deleuze, we do not look for the academic style of the demystifiers, the seekers of truth, or the lovers of wisdom. For these considerations are, programmatically and consistently, situated "on the side of trivial remarks without any pretensions of solving anything, on the side of free babbling." Their goal is neither an approximation of truth classically conceived nor the discovery of the deep meaning of the world, nor a solution to the puzzles of human existence. On the contrary, theses inspired by the characteristic postmodernist idea of the end of philosophy are dictated only by a "passion for writing, for the creation of appearances, and for mystification."[27] On that view, any conceivable work presented as metaphysical is only the product of a programmatic mystification.

After the rejection of the cognitive value of metaphysics, the value of physics and the possibility of making an epistemological distinction between the status of the natural and the social sciences are also put in question. In spite of the traditional distinctions, in which the nomothetic and the idiographic sciences were opposed to one another, Rorty writes:

> … we must resist the temptation to think that the redescriptions of reality offered by contemporary physical or biological science are somehow closer to "the things themselves," … than the redescriptions of

27 Bogdan Banasiak, *Filozofia "końca filozofii"* (Warsaw: Spacja, 1997), 9. The author draws on intellectual inspirations other than Rorty. He cites Bataille, according to whom the essential form of the expression of content is "babbling in ecstasy" (pp. 203 ff.). In place of a rational analysis of the complex reality of the world, he introduces the simple declarations of Borges suggesting that "nothing in life matters except fantasizing" (p. 9).

> history offered by contemporary culture criticism. We need to see the constellations of causal forces which produced talk of DNA or of the Big Bang as of a piece with the causal forces which produced talk of "secularization" or of "late capitalism." These various constellations are the random factors which have made some things subjects of conversation for us and others not….[28]

From the perspective of an epistemology in which the concept of truth is no longer used, one can only speak of the themes of conversations, skirmishes, and discussions. They are supposed to depend on social factors, without regard to whether the "conversation" concerns mathematics or literary criticism. Differences of view in these conversations depend on which of the various social factors belonging to the "constellation of causal forces" will be recognized as most important by the majority of those interested in the conversation. There was a time when theology or metaphysics was recognized as queen of the sciences. In the days of the Vienna Circle, physics was recognized as the paradigmatic discipline. Now Rorty is introducing a hierarchy in postmodern epistemology, declaring, "I want to defend ironism, and the habit of taking literary criticism as the presiding discipline."[29] It is not possible to conduct a substantive discussion of his idea. For he presents it, not as an expression of truth, but as the consequence of habits. The intellectual heritage of humanity is, then, put into question not on the basis of rational arguments, but in the name of pragmatic habit.

Pragmatic Totalitarianism

The radical rejection of the classical concept of truth is to a large degree a reaction to the contemporary collapse of the Enlightenment faith in rationality and progress. The unprecedented achievements of science and technology in the past century, in place of the expected ideals, brought us two totalitarian systems. The deep internal antinomies of contemporary society manifest themselves in the fact that a globalization bringing controversial cultural values today comes together with exceptional manifestations of nationalisms and ethnic conflicts. A sense of helplessness is experienced when attempts to remove those great dangers with the help of rational argument and

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28 CIS, 16–17. It is worthy of note that Rorty still makes use of the term "causal forces" despite the fact that the term cause is strongly metaphysically charged.

29 Ibid., 83.

appeal to a universal hierarchy of values turn out to be ineffective. Supporters of extreme pragmatism propose radical solutions in which the value of the entire earlier cultural tradition is undermined.

The principal danger which must be mentioned in an evaluation of that extreme version of pragmatism is expressed in the thesis: a definitive departure from the classical concept of truth and values brings with it the risk of a new totalitarianism, which I have called *nihilistic totalitarianism*. It is difficult to see as the justification of an action the fact that, in its origin, it was guided by the principles of pragmatism. In the building of the crematoria at Auschwitz and in the application of the technology of genocide, pragmatic criteria also played an important role. The totalitarianisms of the twentieth century depended on a radical elevation to the rank of absolute value goods which had only a relative character, for example, the Germanic race or so-called proletarian justice. That same mechanism functions in interpretive proposals which could become the foundation of a pragmatic totalitarianism. An attempt is made to give an absolute character to the limitations on rationality and truth discovered in the past century, asserting that truth as classically understood is an illusion and faith in the rational interpretation of the world is a manifestation of a poetics lacking a rational justification.

On that view, what is proposed is a variant of pluralistic society in which there is no domination of one group or of one cultural or intellectual tradition by another. Liberal social principles guarantee an unrestricted expression of cultural and ethnic differences. The unintended bitter irony of that proposal manifests itself in the fact that it excludes a community of consensus with regard to universal values which express the most important elements of the cultural inheritance of the species *homo sapiens*.[30] In such a society we do not discover any objective truth but create our common world. Neither values nor moral principles lead to an objective order binding on all people, and even less do they speak of the transcendent causes of that order. They are only the consequences of various forms of creativity. Instead of repeating noble declarations about the distinctive place of *animal rationale*, we should assert with self-irony that we are only "the product which the use of those tools produced. The product is *us*—our conscience, our culture, our form of life."[31] The proud feeling of our own creativity leads finally to a blurring of the distinction between creator and product. Beyond the rules of parliamentary procedure, there are no objective rules which could limit creativity, whether in the creation of new cultural models or in the planning of new kinds of concentration camps. Man receives

30 Cf. Zdzisław Krasnodębski, "Złudzenia dawne i nowe," *Znak* 51 (1999): 7: 24,

31 Rorty, CIS, 55–56.

unlimited possibilities to create both nonsense and new kinds of concentration camps.

The Borders of Creativity

One can regard as the cultural *signum* of our time the fact that at a time of great homogenization in many spheres of human activities, the possibility of creating one's own version of metaphysics, ethics, and axiology remains open to everyone. In theory, such a possibility existed even in earlier times. It was used, however, only by those thinkers who had a conviction of their exceptional role in the discovery of truth. Contemporary postmodernist egalitarianism gives each person the possibility of taking the role of private metaphysician. At the same time, however, it gives up the classical concept of truth. Philosophy conducted as a form of literature becomes then a manifestation of artistic creativity which cannot be subordinated to objective criteria of assessment.

In the radical critique of modernity, the result of human creativity turns out to be God as well as the conception of man, truth, meaning, and values. In a world subordinated to the principles of that critique, the highest authority in the philosophy of God would be Ludwig Feuerbach. For it is he who maintained that man creates God in his image and likeness. Creativity turns out to be our primary characteristic in the complex process of interaction with the world which surrounds us. It belongs also to other beings, to whom we cannot properly apply the term "our." The representatives of other cultures and the supporters of quite different views in philosophy, social ethics, and the theory of culture are also creative. There are no objective criteria to which one can subordinate their creativity. There are no suprasystemic principles which could make evaluation possible when controversies must be overcome. There remains only the search for consensus, subordinated to the bureaucratic procedures of the counting of votes.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, when the attempt was made to subordinate physics to an extreme version of empiricism based on Bridgman's operationalism,[32] the essence of physics was sarcastically reduced to the principle: "Start counting; stop thinking." At present, an attempt is being made to carry out such a reduction on all of culture, removing thinking from science and philosophy and subordinating the pragmatics of social life to a procedure of counting democratically cast votes. For a short time, operationalism fascinated many minds with its radicalism. Over the course of twenty or thirty

32 I discuss this problem in *Elementy filozofii nauki* (Tarnów: Biblos, 1996), 73–94.

years, however, it turned out, that such radicalism would lead to the self-destruction of physics. Deprived of theoretical terms, it would have to transform itself into a mosaic of observations, completely different from physics as it really exists. The unlimited creativity of these radical proposals is now only a curiosity in the handbooks of the history of physics. Necessary limitations are required so that creativity does not turn out to be only a particular case of self-destruction.

In the Biblical description of the sin of our first parents, the eating of the fruit of the trees of knowledge is the immediate cause of the drama. The fruit of that tree "was to be desired to make one wise" (Genesis 3:6) and had great aesthetic value, appearing as "a delight to the eyes" and it was supposed to introduce the Divine ability to distinguish objective good from evil (Genesis 3:5). On the postmodernist view of the creation of meaning, there are no objective values and both aesthetics and all other knowledge are sets of subjective illusions. The Garden of Eden's tree of knowledge would have to be pulled up in order to bring the process of the disenchantment of the world to its logical conclusion. Gilles Deleuze, in introducing a metaphorics of rhizomes in place of the tree of knowledge, has already given much concrete advice to that effect. If someone were to see the process of pulling up the tree of knowledge as not in agreement with the principles of human ecology, it would be possible to persuade him that the Romantic metaphorics of Paradise no longer speak to our generation. To nomads wandering without goal or meaning, the gray, interwoven rhizomes of the plants of the steppe are psychologically more congenial than is the illusive *fata morgana* with the intensive greenness of a tree of paradise. A problem nevertheless appears when each individual nomad wants to take the role of sole authority in the sphere of omni-science.

The absolutely unhindered creation of an individual version of omni-science is a sign of regress to primitive times when mythology existed in place of science and philosophy, theology and lectures on fundamental morality. One can understand the psychological causes of the longing for a state of primeval innocence in which the existence of man was not yet disturbed by the question of *arche* or of the hierarchy of values. The absolutization of that longing can, however, be a sign of the apotheosis of infantilism, which avoids actions characteristic of the mature stage of our culture. Infantile creativity can seem to be an attractive occupation for beings who have had enough of controversies about rationality. It requires, however, the setting of necessary limitations if we want to avoid cultural self-destruction.

VII. THE QUARREL OVER THE LEGACY OF THE ENLIGHTENMENT: ACHIEVEMENT OR ILLUSION?

Between the Enlightenment and Auschwitz

The postmodern disenchantment with the world brings with it a strong critique of the Enlightenment faith in reason, science, and progress. At its foundations are found both the great disappointments of the twentieth century and a yearning for a simple world untainted by the influence of science and technology. Immanuel Kant saw in the Enlightenment the triumph over the immaturity of the human species and its entrance into cultural and social maturity.[1] Three centuries of the internal development of that trend now bring a situation in which the attempt is made to interpret that presumed maturity as a manifestation of senility. Anti-Enlightenment rhetoric is expressed both in the radical critique of the internal complaints of modernity and in statements about post-Enlightenment culture.[2]

Various emphases appear in the critical evaluation of the legacy of the Enlightenment. Lyotard asserted that it is necessary to take into consideration a "postmodern condition,"[3] which is far removed from the expectations of Enlightenment rationalists. Marcuse tried to describe its essence, speaking about "the end of Utopia."[4] Vattimo emphasized a disturbing "ontology of decline;"[5] Gargani saw in it above all "the crisis of reason;"[6] and G. A. Lindbeck declared the new age to be "postliberal."[7]

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1 Immanuel Kant, *What is Enlightenment?*

2 Charles Taylor, "The Immanent Counter-Enlightenment," in *Canadian Political Philosophy: Contemporary Reflections*, eds. Ronald Beiner and Wayne Norman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 583.

3 Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984).

4 Herbert Marcuse, "The End of Utopia," in his *Five Lectures*, trans. Jeremy J. Shapiro and Shierry M. Weber (Boston: Beacon, 1970).

5 Gianni Vattimo, *The End of Modernity: Nihilism and Hermeneutics in Postmodern Culture*, trans. Jon R. Snyder (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1988).

6 Aldo Giorgio Gargani, *Crisi della ragione* (Turin: G. Einaudi, 1979).

7 George A. Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1984).

Between the optimistic vision of the Enlightenment and the crematoria of Auschwitz, there occurred a deep evolution of evaluations, the manifestation of which was not only the undermining of the Enlightenment faith in reason, but also the renunciation of truth as classically conceived and the search for its purely pragmatic counterparts. This is not surprising if we take into account the important differences in the positions of the main representatives of the tradition of the Enlightenment, which were clear from the beginning. They appeared already in commentaries on the fundamental works of modern physics. As an example, one can point to deep differences in the philosophical reception of Newton's *Principia* in the British and the French versions of the Enlightenment.

Both in France and in Britain, the framework of modern physics presented by Newton was accepted with the greatest respect. Voltaire's fascination with the new science was so great that, together with his friend, the Marquise de Châtelet, he translated the *Principia* into French, without understanding either the obsolescent mathematical notation of the original or the fundamental principles of the new physics. In his philosophical commentary on that physics, he limited himself to consideration of the simplest interpretive possibilities, taking deism to be an ideological article of faith. The approach of British commentators was fundamentally different, extracting from the text a whole spectrum of interpretive possibilities in their treatment of the same topic.

This diversity of positions makes it advisable to keep one's distance from those interpretive formulations in which the attempt is made to present the Enlightenment tradition as monolithic and free from entanglement in internal inconsistencies. The scientific discoveries of Newton and Euler turned out to be very important for the development of the ideas of the Enlightenment. Ideological commentaries in the style of Voltaire, Diderot, and La Mettrie have, however, played a major role in the popularization of these ideas. The differences characteristic of those two approaches still find expression in the internal inconsistencies connected with the intellectual legacy of the Enlightenment. The problem is that, in the postmodernist critique of the Enlightenment, it is much easier to find the style of Voltaire or of La Mettrie than it is to find that of Euler.

At the Sources of the Antinomies

The antinomies hidden in the fundamental principles of the Enlightenment began to appear when attempts were made to make precise positions which had been thought to be uncontroversial at the level of general formulations. They appeared, for example, in attempts to define more exactly the consequences of the Enlightenment

affirmation of freedom and reason. In extreme cases, there began to be cultivated such a powerful poetics of freedom that they severely limited the role of reason and led to a discrediting of truth as classically conceived. The Enlightenment defense of freedom did not lead to agreement on the exact relationship between freedom and such other values as responsibility, solidarity, and compassion. It led to the antinomies which appear in the various versions of contemporary liberalism. The classical treatment of this problem was presented by Horkheimer and Adorno, who wrote in *The Dialectic of Enlightenment* about the "destructive rationality" of that trend. This appeared in the fact that the development of the ideas of the Enlightenment led to the questioning of theses fundamental to the Enlightenment tradition. Intellectual fascinations, gradually growing among the supporters of that trend, inspired both a radical critique of the pre-Enlightenment intellectual tradition and an evaluation full of inconsistencies of classical metaphysics. As a result, "ultimately, the Enlightenment consumed … universal concepts, and spared no remnant of metaphysics apart from the abstract fear of the collective."[8] Horkheimer and Adorno crown the deep evolution of evaluations concerning the intellectual horizon of humanity with the conclusion: "[At the end,] even the very notions of spirit, of truth, and indeed, enlightenment itself, have become animistic magic."[9]

After two centuries, many great ideas of the French Revolution turn out to be ordinary magic formulae. The catalogue of illusions which, in the opinion of the postmodernists, are common to both Christianity and the Enlightenment, lists:

1. Sharp conceptual distinctions concerning the possibility of distinguishing truth from falsity and good from evil;
2. The practice of violence expressed by the acceptance of an objectifying rationality applied both to science and to technology.
3. The attempt to control human history, leading finally to totalitarianism.
4. The domination of universal categories, leading to the persecution of minorities, including sexual minorities.[10]

While it became popular in liberal intellectual circles to catalogue the internal antinomies of the Enlightenment and to make predictions about its inevitable self-destruction, there developed in the

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8 Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, *The Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. John Cumming (New York: Continuum, 1972), 23.

9 Ibid., 11.

10 Gianni Vattimo, *Belief* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1999).

teachings of the Church statements about a "Christian ratification of the Enlightenment."[11] Taking into consideration the deep variation in the positions found in the contemporary Enlightenment tradition, their authors emphasized the fundamental convergence of that tradition with Christian thought in many questions concerning the controversial problems of the contemporary world. Current transformations in the cultural and intellectual horizon lean toward the search for values connecting those two traditions, which are too readily placed in opposition to one another in the development of modern thought.

The tension between Christian thought and the Enlightenment tradition appeared particularly strongly in France in the period following the French Revolution. The polarization of those two traditions, however, had much milder manifestations in Great Britain and in the United States.[12] As characteristic examples of the differences one can cite the completely different treatment of religious believers by the builders of the American and French democracies. When the American Constitution was ratified in 1789, a special reception was organized for the occasion in the city of Philadelphia, which was then the capital. Not only were the representatives of religious minorities invited to the reception, but the Jewish participants were even provided with special kosher dishes. Meanwhile in France, a little more than a decade later, Napoleon organized an official meeting with representatives of the Jewish community about Jewish integration into French society. That meeting was called the Great Sanhedrin and it was called on—a Saturday.

The French style of co-existence, inspired by the rhetoric of Voltaire, forced the Jews to violate the principles of their own religious tradition if they wanted to undertake any cooperation with the government which had declared a dialogue inspired by the principles of democracy. That style of co-existence did not appear in America, but in Europe it created a climate in which religious traditions were opposed to the Enlightenment tradition. When the latter is today subjected to a strong critique by the representatives of postmodernism, it would be an illusion to elevate that critique to the level of Christian evaluations of the Enlightenment. Euler's version of the Enlightenment is much closer to Christianity than is deconstructive postmodernism, in which the classical concept of truth is undermined, rationality is radically rejected,

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11 Claus Leggewie, "Zwischen Kulturkampf und Kapitalismuskritik: Der politische Katholizismus in den USA am Scheideweg," in Krzysztof Michalski, ed., *Aufklärung heute: Castelgandolfo-Gespräche, 1996* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1997), 243.

12 Cf. Hans Maier, "Die Freiheitsidee der Aufklärung und die Katholische Tradition," in Michalski, op. cit., 76.

and values playing a fundamental role both in Christian thought and among the classical authors of the Enlightenment are nihilistically brought into question.

The Critique of Enlightenment Reason

Both in the intellectual optimism of the Enlightenment and in the Christian affirmation of various roads leading to truth, faith in the cognitive abilities of man is important. This is particularly so as regards the ability to know objective truth, discovered in various epistemological perspectives. That faith has found expression both in the subtle distinctions of the scholastics and in the rational thought of the classical authors of the Enlightenment, as well as in the discoveries of the natural sciences, which lead to important social transformations. Belief in the ability to apprehend rationally truths important to our lives is undermined in many versions of contemporary postmodernism. That radically changes both the conception of man, who is not capable of knowing the truth, and the expression of his relation to God. The latter, after the deconstruction of many elementary concepts, can, at most, be a manifestation of human longing or unease of the heart, but it cannot be expressed in terms of an ontological bond between the Divine Absolute and the contingent human individual.

After the rejection of the concept of truth as a relic of the Enlightenment, both the achievements of philosophy as classically understood and the new discoveries of science seem to be only a form of conversation which aids in the creation of a contemporary mythology. The myths thereby created do not claim to be a revelation of truth. Their content is supposed to depend on social causes, without regard to whether the conversation is about mathematics or literary criticism. The postmodernist aim of reducing all of anthropology and metaphysics to the level of purely pragmatic problem-solutions destroys the interpersonal community of meaning which we experience in many activities going beyond the limits of cultural and political causes. Bringing as it does a threat to the values which constitute the cultural community basic to the entire human family, it presents nihilism as a proposed alternative to the Enlightenment faith in reason and progress. As Rorty writes in his characterization of liberalism, that society is "liberal" which is content to give the name "true" (or "right" or "just") to anything that results from undistorted communication, that is to say, to any view which prevails in a free and open clash among the

participants in a conversation aimed at reaching an unforced consensus.[13]

Nihilism after Totalitarianisms

In the course of the last century, various philosophical meanings have been attached to the world "nihilism." In introducing it into philosophy, F. H. Jacobi was influenced by newspaper reports about Russian terrorists.[14] It was popularized, above all, by Nietzsche, who launched an attack on Christianity as a system of thought which denied the will to live. The result of his attack is not only the death of God, but also—indirectly—the death of meaning and truth. The end of the mythology of the Enlightenment was supposed to be nihilism as a stage leading to a new age of myth, in which both the classical conception of truth and the values prized in the tradition associated with Socrates and Christianity are rejected.

It is characteristic that, on the view taken in the encyclical *Fides et Ratio*, nihilism understood as a trend "which is at once the denial of all foundations and the negation of all objective truth"[15] is subjected to a particularly severe critique. The encyclical treats nihilism not only as a position incompatible with revealed truth but also as a denial of the dignity and identity of man. The encyclical's distinction between nihilism and postmodernism suggests that John Paul II does not treat postmodernism as a trend that is necessarily nihilistic. Alongside the nihilistic tradition characteristic of certain schools of postmodernity, there are alternative formulations in which a critique of the legacy of modernity does not have to lead to a nihilistic rejection of the Enlightenment. Formulations which attempt to summarize the entire complexity of the Enlightenment tradition in a few simple judgments are, by their very nature, oversimplified and inadequate. For the fruits of that tradition are both the conception of human rights and contemporary democracy. The durability of that legacy requires a foundation of axiological and moral principles which the deconstructive variant of postmodernism is not capable of providing.

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13 Elsewhere, Rorty defines "undistorted communication" as "the sort you get when you have democratic political institutions and the conditions for making these institutions function." CIS, 84.

14 T. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, trans. E. B. Ashton (New York: Seabury Press, 1973), 379.

15 FeR, ¶90.

The Axiology of Democracy

Both the classical thinkers of the Enlightenment and the founders of American democracy shared the view expressed today in *Centesimus Annus* that democracy can be a stable system only when it is based on axiological foundations.[16] The first president of the United States, George Washington, in his Farewell Address, emphasized that a moral foundation is necessary to democracy. He took it to be obvious and unquestionable that: "virtue or morality is a necessary spring of popular government."[17] Similarly, Alexis de Tocqueville emphasized how important a role is played by values and the moral principles of Judaism and Christianity in shaping the foundations of democratic institutions. He summarized his thoughts on that theme by saying:

> Religion, which never intervenes directly in the government of American society, should therefore be considered as the first of their political institutions, for … it singularly facilitates their use thereof.[18]

We can find a categorical rejection of such opinions today in the works of Rorty. The author of *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* sees as a relic, and categorically rejects as a manifestation of "Enlightenment scientism," the opinion that the functioning of liberal society requires any kind of philosophical foundations either from the field of metaphysics or from the fields of axiology or ethics. He says that a search for the philosophical foundations of democracy was a result of an unfortunate combination of the Enlightenment faith in science and with the religious search for transcendent causes and a naïve effigy of "the scientist as a sort of priest, someone who achieved contact with nonhuman truth by being 'logical,' 'methodical,' and 'objective.'"[19] He categorically denies that it would be possible to maintain today that form of Enlightenment scientism, which is, in its essence, "a survival of the religious need to have human projects underwritten by a nonhuman authority."[20]

The attempt to reduce axiology to a subset of pragmatic values could at most bring a new version of those totalitarian systems which in

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16 John Paul II, *Centesimus Annus*, ¶46.

17 J.D. Richardson, ed., *Compilation of Messages and Papers of the Presidents* (New York: Bureau of National Literature, 1897), 1: 212.

18 Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America* (New York: Anchor, 1966): 292.

19 CIS, 52; cf. also "Science as Solidarity," in ORT.

20 CIS, 52.

our century have tried to seek an ideological utopia at the cost of experiments on society. An alternative to that approach is a concern for those values which were prized both in the Enlightenment tradition and in that of Socrates and Christianity. The alternative formulated on this topic by Owen Chadwick seems to be convincing: either we choose a democratic state with a foundation in moral values or we reject that foundation and are condemned to a police state. Democracy cannot exist in a state in which moral principles are not respected. The ignoring of such principles would of necessity turn such a state into a police state in which the primary role would be played by propaganda and a system of repression.[21] Our common task is this: having overcome two totalitarian systems, to undertake activities which will allow future generations to avoid the tragedy of genocide.

That idea inspires many academics who are trying to draw some conclusions from the painful experiences of the past. Their ideas are aimed at building, in solidarity with others, a more humane world in which the particular dignity of the person is recognized and treated as the most noble component of human culture. An attempt is made to define the nature of the person by appeal to the category of relative autonomy, responsibility, self-transcendence,[22] ability to love self and others,[23] and ability to offer oneself as a gift. On that view, what is necessary is both the consistent elimination of the previous incoherencies present in the tradition of the Enlightenment and the harmonious union of concern for freedom and truth in the effort to build a world in which the word "humanism" would not be an empty term. Any attempt to reduce those two fundamental values to one, which would be seen as more fundamental, brings with it well-known dangers. The encyclical *Fides et ratio* reminds us of this:

> Once the truth is denied to human beings, it is pure illusion to try to set them free. Truth and freedom either go together hand in hand or together they perish in misery.[24]

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21 Owen Chadwick, "Demokratie und Religion," in Krzysztof Michalski, ed., *Europa und die Civil Society: Castelgandolfo-Gespräche, 1989* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1991). 145.

22 Giuseppe Natoli, "La psicoterapia nel contesto: verità e libertà nella cultura contemporanea," in *Verità e libertà*, 157.

23 Antonio Mercurio, *Teoria della persona e metapsicologia personalistica* (Roma: Bulzoni, 1978).

24 FeR, ¶90.

A working paper of the Synod of Bishops' Second Special Assembly for Europe draws our attention to disturbing signs of the neglect of the interrelation between freedom and truth. We read there:

> a freedom taken in an absolute sense and isolated from other values–like that of solidarity–can lead to the disintegration of life on the continent; a freedom claimed as absolute runs the risk of destroying the very society it helped to construct.[25]

From the perspective of Christian axiology, the opposition of freedom to truth is an oversimplification. Robert Spaemann rightly notes: "The continuation of the Enlightenment takes for granted the old belief that man is a free being and one capable of truth."[26] Many intellectual misunderstandings in the contemporary world arise from the fact that, in the past, the interrelation between these two values was defined with insufficient precision.

Freedom or Truth?

The well-known tension between freedom and truth was historically caused by those painful incidents in the history of science in which an attempt was made to limit the freedom of researchers in the name of superior truths. Such procedures, symbolically associated with the tragedy of Galileo, meet today with an unequivocal condemnation. The fact that one can understand the psychological context of such cases does not, however, authorize one to oppose truth to freedom, absolutizing the latter in the process. The values mentioned are so closely related to one another that it turns out in research practice to be impossible to realize one of them without the other. As John Paul II said in his message to the United Nations: "freedom is ordered to the truth, and is fulfilled in man's quest for truth."[27] If we were to give up the concept of truth, then freedom would turn out to be an empty word, to

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25 "Synodus episcoporum: Coetus specialis pro Europa, *Jesus Christ Alive in his Church: The Source of Hope for Europe* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1998), an *Instrumentum Laboris* (Working Document) prepared for the Synod of Bishops' Second Special Assembly for Europe of 1-23 October 1999, ¶13.

26 Robert Spaemann, "Der innere Widerspruch der Aufklärung," in *Aufklärung heute*, 234–235.

27 Pope John Paul II, " The Fabric of Relations Among Peoples," Address to the United Nations General Assembly, *Origins* 25: 18 (5 October 1995): 293–299, ¶12.

which one cannot ascribe any concrete meaning. In that sense, those who choose freedom over truth would be the Nazi inventors of the slogan *Arbeit macht frei*. If we introduce a rhetorical slogan in place of truth, then dreams about free society turn out to be only a projection of illusions. Concern about a free democratic society requires the recognition of elementary truths about the nature of freedom.

In order to see how the search for the truth about freedom can take grotesque forms, one can cite the insightful analyses of that problem presented, for example, by Charles Taylor[28] or Will Kymlicka.[29] Those authors compare the situation of England with that of Albania before 1990. In that period, the restrictions of the totalitarian government did not allow the practice of religion in Albania. At the same time, in England the freedom (narrowly understood) of its residents was limited, for example, by traffic regulations, regulations which were less burdensome in Albania where not many people had cars and the traffic lights rarely worked. In a purely quantitative approach to questions on the limitations on freedom, it is possible to argue that greater freedom reigned in Communist Albania if only because the freedom of Albanians to go to church was limited only once a week, while the average Londoner was limited dozens of times a day with respect to crossing a street against a red light. Kymlicka points out how serious are the difficulties in which contemporary libertarians entangle themselves when they are trying to solve such questions. Usually, they introduce *ad hoc* provisional criteria lacking any deep theoretical justification.[30]

The situation described above is evidence of a deeper phenomenon present in the intellectual legacy of the Enlightenment. The development of science, technology, and democratic institutions has already led to the realization of many principles formulated in the Enlightenment vision of society. However, at the same time the rapid tempo of cultural transformations, especially after the fall of the second kind of totalitarianism, brought additional antinomies. These show that there is a great need to elaborate the philosophical foundations of liberal democracy in order to eliminate the incoherencies that appear both at the level of cultural phenomena and at the level of social institutions. The axiological incoherencies evident in the functioning of institutions of various kinds are connected with the fact that the "ethic of care" comes

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28 Charles Taylor, *Philosophy and the Human Sciences* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 219.

29 Will Kymlicka, *Contemporary Political Philosophy: An Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 139–140.

30 Ibid., 141.

into sharp conflict with the "ethic of justice."[31] In many fields, only the portents of that conflict appear, signaled by the radical slogans of groups whose activities are legitimately accepted in the framework of the principle of pluralism of viewpoints.

Among the concrete questions which can be the subject of heated controversy appear, for example, that of the place of privacy in family life. How far can the law go in its interventions in family life? On one side, we find the traditional picture of a domestic refuge, with an inviolable sphere of privacy. On the other side, radical feminists postulate a so-called liberalization of the family by means of a broader application of the idea of contract to the sphere of marriage and family.

Any attempt to solve that problem requires that one take into account the fact that particular values set limits on one another. That requires both insightful elaborations from the field of axiology and ethics as well as clear theses in anthropology. Those last must provide an answer to the question of the conception of the human person and its dignity, which is prior to all pragmatic regulations. It brings many controversial questions, both for classical metaphysics and for contemporary currents. At the same time, in many schools of philosophy very different from one another, we find a creative expression of a personalism which brings a new hope of attaining a basic consensus with respect to our understanding of the dignity of the human person.

It is necessary to work for compromise, weighing substantive arguments and not looking for simple evaluations of the tradition of the Enlightenment. In the practice of countries inspired by that tradition, one finds very different kinds of behavior. One cannot treat in the same way those who violate human rights and those who have worked out the theoretical foundations for a declaration of those rights. It is necessary, nevertheless, to seek those common values and principles which were able to bring together representatives of various positions and traditions into a common protest against the violation of human rights. That protest took understandable forms, in the case of news about the practices of totalitarian governments. Accessible news about the extent of those practices brings the obligation to search for a common, basic version of humanism which could be accepted without regard to cultural, religious, or philosophical differences.

To that end, it is necessary to work out a conception of the human person and of the world of fundamental human values which could be recognized to be independent of the exact differences occurring between various systems. The problem of personalism is still waiting for

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31 Cf., e.g., Carol Gilligan, "Remapping the Moral Domain," in *Reconstructing Individualism: Autonomy, Individuality, and the Self in Western Thought* (Stanford: Stanford University Press), 238.

a fundamental treatment which could unite representatives of various philosophical traditions. The paradox of the development of Western civilization manifests itself in the fact that in its intellectual development over the course of the last three centuries much more attention was given to questions of technique than to questions of anthropology. If we were to get as large a difference of opinion with respect to the foundations of classical mechanics today as we now do in anthropology, then most of the technical equipment which we use would not function.

Postmodernism and Democracy

The postmodernist rejection of the Enlightenment would be relatively harmless if it were treated only as a manifestation of a poetics expressing the unverifiable feelings of its creators. The problem appears when the attempt is made to introduce it into social life and into the legislation which regulates it. Until now, parliamentary debates have created the occasion for weighing arguments, for discussing the moral aspects of proposed legislation and for searching for objective criteria of evaluation. After the rejection of the classical concept of truth and the questioning of the objective character of moral values, such a possibility disappears. On the new view, there is a chance for disagreements and conversations, but there is no basic horizon of common meaning which could unify the legislators in a liberal state. We do not encounter such a view only in the academic ideas of Rorty's supporters. Its echoes can already be heard in documents written by lawyers who share the assumptions of antimetaphysical pragmatism. So, for example, a recent US Supreme Court decision includes the statement that "at the heart of liberty is the right to define one's own concept of existence, of meaning, of the universe, and the mystery of human life."[32] Michael Novak says of that statement: "This is pure nihilism. … [I]t gives the illusion of total freedom and unfettered autonomy."[33]

In the decision of the Supreme Court, one sees a clear convergence with the position of Rorty. For the affirmation that everyone has the unhindered right to define his own conception of meaning implies the right of Nazis to their own interpretation of the Holocaust and the right of the supporters of tribal ethics to defend ethnic cleansing. When there are no objective criteria for the determination of the acceptable meaning of the term "the mystery of human life," then all

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32 *Planned Parenthood of Southeastern Pennsylvania v. Casey* 505 U.S. 833 (1992).

33 Michael Novak, *On Cultivating Liberty: Reflections on Moral Ecology* (Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield, 1999), 10.

pathologies, from the drug trade to pedophilia, can be approved as an expression of the individual approach to experiencing the mysteries of human life. When there are no objective criteria of truth, meaning, and human values, then one must put on the same level kitsch and the artistic masterpiece, the nonsense of the ideologue and the wisdom of esteemed moral authorities.

Looking at the evolution of ideas in Europe from the time of the Enlightenment to today, one notes how the optimism of the thinkers of the Enlightenment gradually broke down. Both their faith in reason and their positivistic trust in science, which were supposed to bear fruit in the ideal society of the twentieth century, finally led to two world wars and to two systems of totalitarianism. These brought forms of genocide unknown in earlier history. That drama of our century is in some sense also a drama of Christian presence in culture, since it was with Europe that the development of Christianity took a particular form. This forces the unavoidable question: Were earlier, effective countermeasures against Nazism possible when the *Übermensch* first assumed the attractive form of an ideology?

It is difficult to assume optimistically that anti-humanistic ideologies exhausted their attractiveness after the fall of Nazism and Communism. Certainly new experimenters will seek out new alternative versions of "civilized genocide." That poses for all of us the concrete question about the limits of toleration with respect to experiments on culture. Michurinism, which was once proposed in biology, was falsified by biology itself. New supporters of Michurin and Lysenko want to carry out experiments in the field of culture and ethics. Their radical proposals can once again fascinate the minds of the young with simple visions and optimistic forecasts. Therefore social thought requires asking about basic human solidarity with respect to cultural transformations. A poll conducted in France in 1993 on the acceptance of the ideals of the French Revolution shows the depth of those transformations: 65% of Frenchmen say that, of all the ideals of the Revolution, they value freedom most; 21% value equality; and only 12% value solidarity. Some 63% of Frenchmen polled said that pursuit of pleasure was the basic principle of their philosophy of life.[34] Commenting on those results, some French authors went so far as to advance the drastic thesis that, in Europe, we have already crossed into the final stage of human evolution, the time of egology.[35]

Christianity, announcing an ethics of altruistic openness to the needs of one's neighbors, counteracts that Cassandric vision. The

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34 Jean-Claude Petit, *Dieu a-t-il un avenir?* (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1996), 115.

35 Ibid., 111 ff.

problem is that both the pragmatics of positivism and the theory of liberal democracy present agnosticism as the philosophy most relevant to pluralistic democracy. When tolerance is understood as respect for every alternative interpretation, then the declaration of personal convictions even in questions as fundamental as the existence of God can easily be taken as a sign of intolerance. In the situation in which religion is treated as a private phenomenon, an explicit declaration of one's religious convictions can easily be taken as a sign of fanaticism in which outdated classical notions of the possibility of knowing the truth or of solving the fundamental questions of theology and metaphysics continue to be held. The consistent elimination of religious questions from discussions carried on in the mass media is a sociological factor which facilitates the formation of that attitude.[36]

The replacement of metaphysics with *savoir-vivre* can bring new versions of anti-intellectualism which are a contradiction both of the *ethos* of the Gospel and the tradition of the Enlightenment. Therefore the joint search for a community of human values is also very important at present. In the present cultural pluralism, will Christianity continue to be able to fulfill its culture-creating mission of announcing the Good News in a secularized world? The present situation of the Church does not differ greatly from that of the Church in Apostolic times, when both the cultural models of the *Imperium Romanum* and the hierarchy of values accepted in Judaism differed greatly from radical, evangelical models. As then, Christianity must now seek new forms for the transmission of the Gospel, avoiding the absolutization of means which were effective at an earlier stage of its history. Likewise, rejecting the ideas of populist postmodernism, Christian thought should seek creative dialogue with constructive postmodernism. The history of the early Church teaches that the audience encountered on the pagan Areopagi finally made a greater contribution to the work of evangelization than did the acquaintances met at the Portico of Solomon. Therefore, on the Areopagi of today, the Church must challenge the various versions of postmodernism there on offer by showing both an area of shared concern with our contemporaries and the location of an uncrossable Rubicon.

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36 Cf. Donald Murray, "Agnosticismo: la filosofia della democrazia?" in Paul Poupard, ed., *Parlare di Dio all'uomo postmoderno: linee di discussione* (Roma: Città Nuova, 1994), 50.

VIII. THE *KENOSIS* OF MEANING

The Cultural Face of *Kenosis*

The rejection of the Enlightenment tradition and the questioning of the objective character of the values accepted by the perennial philosophy lead either to nihilism or to the phenomenon called the *kenosis* of meaning. The Greek term *kenosis*, taken from the language of the Bible, means impoverishment or emptying. From the theological point of view, the *kenosis* of Christ consists of the fact that, having a Divine nature, He "emptied himself, … humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross" (Philippians 2: 7–8).

Representatives of various philosophical schools note a phenomenon of cultural *kenosis* characteristic of our time. This manifests itself in the abandonment of the great ideals which inspired the actions of earlier generations and in the acceptance as a model of that which is empty, worthless, and embarrassingly small. Perhaps *kenosis* understood in this way could bring a spiritual purification in which, leaving ambitious Utopias behind, we would experience the suffering of the Cross, in order, by means of a cultural catharsis, to formulate more deeply the painful truth about man and to free oneself from earlier illusions.

The postmodernist experience of the dramatic dimension of life could without a doubt fulfill the cathartic functions. It is necessary, however, to note that, in the version of populist postmodernism most influential in mass culture, we find techniques of persuasion which, at the level of superficial aesthetics, programmatically silence consciences and aim at counteracting elementary questions about meaning, sacrifice, or fidelity. The comic book version of the now shallow culture no longer shows either the sorrows of young Werther nor the passionate polemics of Naphta and Settembrini. Among the new literary characters of the postmodernist style Donald Duck, Mickey Mouse, Goofy, and perhaps Big Brother, appear as symbols of a civilization which, in place of reflection, introduces a modernized peep through the keyhole. As a sample of Disney's version of theology conducted on the same level, one can mention Max Ernst's "The Ascension of Mickey Mouse."[1] Mickey Mouse, which Federico Garcia Lorca already presented in the 1930's as a symbol of the tragedy of American society,[2] appears as

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1 See Bartłomiej Dobroczyński, "Nowy wspaniały McŚwiat albo 'wniebowstąpienie Myszki Miki,'" *Znak* 53 (2001): 1: 4–9.

2 Richard Burgin, *Conversations with Jorge Luis Borges* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1969), 109 ff.

some kind of pseudo-Messiah coming to a society which accepted infantilism and consumption as its programmatic credo. The programmatic inanity which requires the formulation of a new form of the Ascension against the background of a plastic sky, can be associated with kitsch, but not with *kenosis*. The law of supply and demand, functioning as the first principle of postmodernity, gives no reason for intellectual satisfaction. The *kenosis* of Christ was an expression of love of neighbor and an act which brought universal redemption. The ostensible *kenosis* of postmodernist culture is an expression of a collective escape from values and meaning into a world of appearances treated as the first principle of being.

Such procedures are not the exclusive product of the fantasy of marketing experts, but are the consequence of the thesis of the death of objective meaning, a thesis which is fundamental for deconstructive postmodernism. If objective, classical meaning were subject to deconstruction, then the individual reader of texts could feel authorized to create meaning even in the region between absurdity and infantilism. Semantics and classical logic, then, become like art. Man, taking on the role of creative artist, shows his antipathy to classical canons of meaning and beauty by escape into nonsense or the style of the scandalists.[3] The latter appear as an avant-garde, proclaiming the next semantic revolution. This is especially dangerous because one can draw from it all other types of revolution, presenting all kinds of nonsense as particular achievements of the human species.

The Archaeology of Nonsense

Among postmodernist declarations about the death of God and the death of man, the announcement of the death (or, the complete blurring) of meaning turns out to be particularly dangerous for the classical hierarchy of values. It is a consequence both of the critique of traditional epistemology and of the recognition of extremely radical methods in the interpretation of texts. We find a model expression of the defense of radicalism in the polemics of Jonathan Culler, when, formulating principles for the interpretation of texts, he asserts: "Interpretation is interesting only when it is extreme."[4] On that view,

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3 Giancarlo Bruni, "Dire di Dio agli uomini d'oggi," in Paul Poupard, ed., *Parlare di Dio all'uomo postmoderno: linee di discussione* (Roma: Città Nuova, 1994), 25.

4 Jonathan Culler, "In Defense of Overinterpretation," in Umberto Eco, *Interpretation and Overinterpretation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 110. Perhaps as a form of reaction to the boring texts in the classic, academic style, in discussions about postmodernism often appears a

the main role is played by the psychologically understood category of interest, "being interesting." It undoubtedly has a subjective character and depends to a large degree on immediate psychological causes. Among those under the influence of Feuerbach, Nietzsche, or contemporary scandalists, what are recognized as interesting are interpretations which depart programmatically from classical academic standards and which have as their primary goal to upset the reader. In the anthropological perspective in which the place of *Homo sapiens* is taken by *Homo ludens*, the search for means of action that will give rise to consternation is an important occupation. In classical searches for truth and beauty, meaning and harmony were inspiring values. In the contemporary practice of the scandalists, the search for means of action which, because of their extreme character, will embarrass the reader remains fundamental. Such a reaction of embarrassment was earlier achieved by means of kitsch or nonsense. At present, the use of both of these means is recognized *ex cathedra* as a manifestation of the search for "interesting interpretations."

Postmodernists who do not want to upset others with their radicalism can take a much more pragmatic position with respect to the interpretation of texts. Richard Rorty works out such a position, asserting that one cannot ascribe to texts just any objective meaning, since it is imperative to get over the traditional longing to know metaphysical reality in itself. In the opinion of that American philosopher, such a reality does not exist, and our interpretive categories serve the realization of pragmatic ends. Therefore one should not search for any single permissible interpretation, rather it is necessary to take into consideration a broad collection of possible interpretations which could turn out to be useful for various ends. That position is held by many other supporters of postmodernism paraphrasing Todorov's metaphor suggesting that a text is only a picnic to which the author brings the words and the reader the meaning.[5] The justification for such a metaphorics is to be sought in the writings of Derrida who postulates the instability of meaning for all written texts. Supportive of that position are the works of the American deconstructionist authors (Paul de Man[6] and J. Hillis-Miller[7]), according to whom unlimited and

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category of "being interesting." Harold Bloom, for example, characterizes Richard Rorty as "the most interesting living philosopher in the world."

5 Tzvetan Todorov, "Viaggio nella critica americana," *Lettera* 4 (1987): 12.

6 *Allegories of Reading: Figural Language in Rousseau, Nietzsche, Rilke, and Proust* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979); *Blindness and Insight: Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983).

unverifiable streams of interpretations can appear in the consciousness of the reader; we have no objective bases for treating some of those interpretations as the only permissible ones. The meaning brought to the picnic by the readers surprises the readers themselves; it is not necessary to spoil the picnic mood by the introduction of semantic regulations.[8]

The principles of picnic semantics remain attractive particularly to those who have not experienced the totalitarian manipulation of meaning in an entire society. In America, Rorty has had limited opportunities for close observation of the practices of those ideologues who did not attach to their statements any one objective meaning, but, depending on immediate circumstances, tried to give their statements the meaning for which a social need had arisen *hic et nunc*. The deconstruction of meaning promoted by the author of *The Consequences of Pragmatism* could turn out to be extremely useful in the justification of Orwellian reinterpretations. European critics of Rorty emphasize that his pragmatism is a by-product of a social well-being to which the tragedies which the European continent experienced in the last century are completely foreign.

Rejecting *Logos*?

Jacques Derrida formulates the role of the deconstruction of meaning in a way different from Rorty. In hermeneutics, he opposes the tradition represented by Schleiermacher and Gadamer to a tradition of which the symbols are the names of Nietzsche and Heidegger. In the first of these, the interpreter is supposed to reach an objective sense which a correct interpretation of the text discovers. In the second tradition, the act of interpreting a text is at the same time its transformation. For it is not merely the extraction of a previously deposited content, but is also a co-creation of meaning which requires interpretation of the interpretation. Derrida finally goes further than Heidegger, accusing him both of logocentrism and inconsistency in his project of overcoming metaphysics. It is also possible to acknowledge that he exceeds Heidegger in complexities of language when he develops a "deconstruction of his destruction."[9] Deconstruction differs

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7 *The Ethics of Reading: Kant, de Man, Trollope, James and Benjamin* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987).

8 See also J. Arac et al., eds., *The Yale Critics: Deconstructions in America* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983).

9 The expression of Joseph Riddel. *The turning word: American literary modernism and continental theory* (Pennsylvania, 1996), 4. Ernst Gellner comments on the complexity of Derrida's language when he says that he considers the views of Rorty to be decidedly false, but cannot make the same

from destruction in the fact that after dismantling the primary meaning right down to its foundational components, it tries to construct a new meaning in a form which takes into consideration the cultural, social, and psychoanalytic causes of the first version of the text. In that way successive texts are laid on top of one another and it finally turns out that "there is nothing outside of the text" ("Il n'y a pas de hors-texte").[10]

In the discussions of various interpretations of texts, many critics value the views of Umberto Eco on account of the precision of his formulations. Born in 1932, the author of *The Name of the Rose* became at nineteen a leader of *Giuventù Italiana di Azione Cattolica*. His dissertation, defended in 1954, considered problems of aesthetics in St. Thomas Aquinas. Looking back at his intellectual evolution from the perspective of time, he saw in that dissertation the typical errors of young academics who try to include into the paradigm of academic standards: "a convoluted style, a tendency to equate the readable with the scientific," a contempt of plain language, and an attempt "to show that the writer had read everything he could find on the subject."[11] At that same time he made an attempt to overcome the growing gap between the culture of the elite and the culture of the masses, and he became known as a decided defender of detective stories.[12] The fact that his novel *The Name of the Rose* sold more than thirty million copies is evidence of the great interest with which the book was received at the level of popular culture.

In contrast to Rorty, Eco, from his experience of Italian Fascism, had the opportunity to become familiar with the semantic manipulations which gave a completely different sense to earlier statements. Therefore, criticizing the conception of so-called unlimited semiosis, he distinguishes a subset of permissible interpretations, the completion of which are overinterpretations. Neglect of the difference of status of the various interpretations is the result of the disregard of the principles of logic which were worked out with great effort in academic institutions both in the Middle Ages and modern times. A methodologically justified neglect does not change the fact that "most so-called 'post-modern' thought will look very pre-antique."[13]

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charge against Derrida, because when he reads Derrida's texts, he is never sure quite what Derrida is talking about.

10 Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), 158.

11 Umberto Eco, *The Aesthetics of Thomas Aquinas*, trans. Hugh Bredin (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988), vii.

12 Cf. Peter Bondanella, *Umberto Eco and the Open Text: Semiotics, Fiction, Popular Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 2 ff.

13 Eco, *Interpretation*, 25.

Therefore, the Italian thinker categorically emphasizes: "I accept the statement that a text can have many senses. I refuse the statement that a text can have every sense."[14] That thesis appears to be uncontroversial since research practice shows deep differences in the attempt to define the meaning of statements. Fundamental problems nevertheless appear in the determination of the subset of permissible meanings when the practice of word games or the search for originality of interpretation takes priority over the logically justified principles of hermeneutics.

The Semantics of a Linguistic Fog

The idea that meaning cannot be captured with the help of the linguistic means available to us had its classic expression in the statement of Paul Valéry that "Il n'y a pas de vrai sens d'un texte" ["There is no true sense of a text"].[15] Its literary illustration could be Gerard de Nerval's novel *Sylvie*,[16] the language of which was analyzed insightfully both by Proust and by Eco. The characteristic feature of the language of that novel is the so-called fog effect—*l'effet de brouillard*. Through the selection of appropriate linguistic means and constructivist techniques, the author of *Sylvie* evokes in the reader a feeling of the indefiniteness of meaning. More and more doubts about the reconstruction of events, about the meaning of the particular statements of characters, and about the imprecision in the drawing of the characters accompanies the reading of the text. Eco expresses his enchantment with that effect, writing:

> I tried many times to analyze *Sylvie* to understand by what narrative and verbal strategies Nerval so masterfully succeeded in challenging his reader. I was not satisfied by the pleasure I experienced as an enthralled reader; I also wanted to experience the pleasure of understanding how the text was creating the fog effect that I was enjoying.[17]

Many supporters of deconstructionism express their satisfaction with the fog effect not only in the reading of novels, but also in the analysis of every kind of statement. They try to justify that reaction by saying that the blurring of meaning in semantics is a phenomenon just as

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14 Eco, "Reply," *Interpretation*, 141.

15 "À propos du *Cimetière marin*," *Œuvres*(Gallimard), I, 1507.

16 Gérard de Nerval, *Sylvie: Recollections of Valois* (New York: AMS Press, 1981).

17 Eco, "Reply," *Interpretation*, 147.

natural as is smog in the conditions of London. While logicians take L. A. Zadeh's theory of fuzzy sets to be an accomplishment, supporters of postmodernism accept the fog effects with satisfaction, treating them as an unavoidable component of our language. Reality speaks to us in a code full of riddles. Its structure radically changes together with change in its particular elements. Our statements contain a deeper meaning, different from that which is perceived by the sender and the receiver. In the classical rationalism which formed European culture, those who babbled instead of engaging in a meaningful transmission of content, were given the name "barbarian." From the perspective of postmodernity, barbarians are supposed to teach the discovery of deep meaning while rationalists remain on the surface of meaning, giving up the search for the information submerged in the semantic fog.

The horizon of foggy nonsense is, in the formulation of postmodernism, the result of a departure both from many terms of classical philosophy and from the substantial conception of man on the part of supporters of the thesis of the death of the cognizing subject. Attainment of the proper meaning of the text, discovered in its natural interpretation, turns out to be impossible because the very concept of nature is considered to be a relic of metaphysics. There are no immutable natures of things; therefore the nature (= essence) of the text cannot exist. There is no reason to take one way of reading it as more natural than another. The communicative bond between the sender of the text and the receiver cannot be overvalued since, if we reject the substantial conception of the human person as a relic of metaphysics, then only statements about the flow of codes transmitted and received on two different levels will remain valid, codes which—like a river—flow independently. Analyzing the attitude of the receiver to this flow, Rorty does not even want to allow Eco's distinction between the *interpretation* of a text and its *use*, since, he says, every interpretation of the text is also a form of use.[18]

The differences dividing particular representatives of that trend can be treated as a logical consequence of the fog effect. Justifying both the metaphorics of the rose and the semantic blurring of terms in his novel *The Name of the Rose*, Eco writes:

> the rose is a symbolic figure so rich in meaning that by now it hardly has any meaning left: Dante's mystic rose, and go lovely rose, the Wars of the Roses, rose thou art sick, too many rings around Rosie, a rose by any other name, a rose is a rose is a rose is a rose, the Rosicrucians. The title rightly disoriented the reader,

18 R. Rorty, "The Pragmatist's Progress," in Eco, *Interpretation,* 93.

> who was unable to choose just one interpretation; and even if he were to catch the possible nominalist readings of the concluding verse, he would come to them only at the end, having previously made God only knows what other choices. A title must muddle the reader's ideas, not regiment them.[19]

The interpretive practice of many representatives of postmodernism shows that the programmatic creation of confusion in the mind of the receiver engages them much more than does the traditional sorting out of ideas. The psychological reaction both against the classical canons of academic correctness and against the rational principles of the hermeneutics of the text leads to a style in which there is a preference for situations regarded as improbable.[20] Linguistic polymorphism, of which Joyce provides the classical models, is a contemporary attempt to react against attitudes towards the world. The world, from an ordered cosmos, in which each object had its natural place, has become a "chaosmos,"[21] in which there are no immutable natures or classical order.

The problem of the multiplicity of permissible interpretations had its rich literature long before the rise of postmodernism. Hilary Putnam, among others, replied negatively to the question of whether the formalization of all our knowledge and of all of our convictions could lead to the determination of a single permissible interpretation, when all the observational data accessible in principle is taken into account.[22] Sharing that position, I wrote in 1988 in an analysis of the epistemological consequences of the Löwenheim-Skolem Theorem: "total use of language in a maximally precise way, i.e., with formalization of each statement and an arbitrarily exact observational characterization is not able to lead to the elaboration of a unique permissible interpretation of reality."[23] At the same time, however, I emphasized that interpretative pluralism neither authorizes a relativism of truth nor justifies an egalitarianism in which all permissible

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19 Umberto Eco, *Postscript to The Name of the Rose*, trans. William Weaver (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1984), 3.

20 Umberto Eco, *The Open Work*, trans. Anna Concogni (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989), 46.

21 Cf. Umberto Eco, *The Aesthetics of Chaosmos: The Middle Ages of James Joyce*, trans. Ellen Esrock (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989).

22 Hilary Putnam, "Models and Reality," *Journal of Symbolic Logic* 45 (1980): 464.

23 Józef Życiński, *Teizm i filozofia analityczna* (Cracow: Znak, 1988), 2: 30.

interpretations are treated as equally good. Such a position would be a manifestation of an easy escape into a form of irrationalism which is a contradiction of the classically understood academic ethos.[24]

At the Limits of Meaning

In the postmodernist poetics of meaning, James Joyce appears as the master of a new style in which "the Middle Ages and the avant-garde meet,"[25] and parody, pastiche, and burlesque become important forms of the expression of our attitude towards the world. Writing not without *pathos* about the special mission of parody, Eco emphasizes:

> This is parody's mission: it must never be afraid of going too far. If its aim is true, it simply heralds what others will later produce, unblushing, with impassive and assertive gravity.[26]

It is necessary to acknowledge that many supporters of postmodernism have managed to take the thesis about the particular mission of parody to extremes. The most explicit manifestation of that approach is the blurring of the distinctions between science and literature and the treatment of scientific texts as only one of many permissible forms of narration. Its consequences were the publications, in ("academic") journals specializing in the critique of modernity, of texts intended as a pseudo-scientific pastiche.[27] Similar examples show that attempts to introduce postmodernist canons of meaning into science are pointless, just as many earlier attempts to hold science to standards of acceptability which were independent of research practice.

It is a bit ironic that the pragmatic critique of science developed under Rorty's influence does not have much in common with the practice of real science. It has become a certain form of poetics to which—in agreement with the declarations of radical pragmatism—corresponding research practices cannot be ascribed. That same evaluation must be made of the postmodernist critique of metaphysics. From the time of Hume, that critique has become the favorite occupation of many academics. That does not, however, change the fact that, without metaphysics, we cannot find answers to the great questions concerning our existence. So, it is possible to recognize as substantively

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24 Ibid., 31.

25 Eco, *The Aesthetics of Chaosmos*, xi.

26 Eco, *Misreadings* (San Diego: Harcourt Brace, 1993), p. 5.

27 I discuss this on the last page of the chapter, "Intersystemic Dialogue as an Illusion of the Contemporary World?"

justified statements about the concrete deficiencies of particular metaphysical systems, but not the wholesale rejection of those systems. An analogical situation occurs in logic. The so-called limitation theorems show the impossibility of answers to some questions formulated in rich logical systems or justify the ambiguous character of many formulations. They do not, however, justify the total rejection of logic.[28]

The renunciation of classical metaphysics would have to lead either to the elimination from our field of interest of many important questions or to the introduction of an implicit common-sense metaphysics in which opinions lacking any substantive justification, but drawn from the salons of the elite or from the mass media, would become the ultimate oracle in matters of truth. In axiology, which Wilhelm defends on the pages of *The Name of the Rose*, tolerance, freedom, indecision, relativism, and skepticism all appear as positive values. On the other hand, the greatest evil is the conviction that it is possible to attain the truth and the arrangement of one's life in accordance with its requirements. Wilhelm, as the *porte parole* of the author, admonishes the novice Adso that language and life are so rich in meaning that it is possible to treat them like the rose of the title, changing their meanings and practicing the theory of games. Towards the end of the novel, he says:

> Fear prophets, Adso, and those prepared to die for the truth, for as a rule they make many others die with them.... Perhaps the mission of those who love mankind is to make people laugh at the truth ... because the only truth lies in learning to free ourselves from the insane passion for the truth.[29]

The teacher of Zbigniew Herbert, Henryk Elzenberg, in his notes from the Stalinist period, emphasized that human life is worth living if there are values for which we would be willing to pay with life itself. He also suggested that the greatness of a human life cannot be treated as a function of sensations but as a consequence of the renunciation of certain values in the name of the acceptance of other, higher values. It is understood that such an axiology and anthropology vividly contrast with a popular, superficial approach to life, to which the categories of the carefree picnic are more congenial than is altruistic

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28 I wrote more on this in *Teizm i filozofia analityczna*, 2: 18–46.

29 Umberto Eco, *The Name of the Rose*, trans. William Weaver (San Diego: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1983), 491.

self-denial. The popularity of attitudes in certain circles does not, however, prejudge their objective value.

For obvious reasons, the epistemology suggested in *The Name of the Rose*, in which the fundamental task is calling researchers away from the passion for the search for truth, is not accepted among scientists and philosophers. It remains, however, a distinct problem whether that perspective could play an essential role in forming cultural attitudes towards the reality which surrounds us. In those attitudes, an important role is played not only by rational explanation, but also by a creative imagination, an aesthetic formulation of events, and a contemplative approach to reality. In the version which Eco proposes, there takes place an important change in the understanding of the function of philosophy, which renounces the ambition of conducting a search for universal truths and becomes a form of interaction with man's cultural environment. Its function can be compared to the role of art in which an important factor remain the individual tastes of particular individuals. The popularity of Mozart does not exclude the possibility of an admiration for dodecaphonic music, and an admiration for the masterpieces of Michelangelo does not exclude appreciation of the gypsum brownies which adorn the gardens of the *nouveaux riches*. The pluralism of alternative possibilities has so far taken place in nearly all fields of knowledge. Even in arithmetic we have the alternative proposals of Abraham Robinson concerning non-standard arithmetics. The characteristic feature of our cultural period is nevertheless the fact that, in the name of giving sufficient appreciation to philosophy understood as conversations of weak thought, the attempt is made to discredit the great metaphysical traditions. That would be an undertaking as unjustified as would be an attempt to discredit Michelangelo's work by the fact that the mass-produced brownies mentioned above and the fragile gypsum from which they are made is psychologically much more congenial to the supporters of the New Age than are marble sculptures evoking Biblical figures.

The Unbearable Lightness of Postmodernism

In semantics, the postmodernist acts like a client in a supermarket. Nothing objectively limits his freedom of choice and it would at most be possible only to discuss whether he himself should exclude certain purchases as inappropriate for a customer who is concerned about his reputation. The category of social reputation is, however, subject to deconstruction in an intellectual circle which tries to find new cultural foundations for postmodernity. Among rationalist critics, such a practice receives an unequivocal condemnation as a manifestation of the unbearable lightness of postmodernism, in which

the style of Kundera's characters is valued more highly than is the great tradition of philosophy.[30] The popularity of that style shows evidence of our cultural atomization, in which many people do not feel bound by the values which incorporate the spiritual and intellectual sense shaped over the course of many centuries. Disconnection from the great tradition comes along with the proposal of extreme individualism in which even the principles of semantics receive an egoistic form.[31]

The radical postulates of deconstructionism evoke accusations of anti-intellectualism in principle. Undoubtedly, anti-intellectualism is present in those postulates when the attempt is made to replace elementary logical connections with rhetorical glibness. It is necessary, however, to admit that the contemporary departure from the great legacy of the classics is a painful consequence of cultural pluralism. While in the past one dominant paradigm led to the definition of models considered to be authoritative both in the natural sciences and in ethics and axiology, the present pluralism of views leads to the co-existence of interpretative proposals which earlier would have been categorically rejected. The mixture of cultures speaking different languages and carrying deeply different axiological proposals bore fruit in an unintended Tower of Babel, in which dialogue turns out to be much more difficult than the disputes practiced in the classical tradition. As a well-known example of that practice it is possible to cite the moral evaluations formulated by Arnold Toynbee in his discussion with Daisaku Ikeda. The English philosopher of history introduces evaluations inconsistent with Christian axiology, saying:

> My Hellenic education has prevailed over my Christian education. Consequently, I feel that suicide and euthanasia are fundamental and indispensable human rights.… I also hold that a human being is violating his own dignity if he fails to commit suicide in certain circumstances.[32]

When we find such declarations, it is easiest to retreat to the thesis of the monadic nomad, to exclude dialogue, and to give each person the right to search for his own personal meaning. Such reactions

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30 Cf. Gary J. Percesepe, "The Unbearable Lightness of Being Postmodern," *Christian Scholar's Review* 20 (1991): 118.

31 Cf. Gary Gutting, *Pragmatic Liberalism and the Critique of Modernity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 81.

32 Arnold J. Toynbee and Daisaku Ikeda, *The Toynbee-Ikeda Dialogue: Man Himself Must Choose* (New York: Harper & Row, 1976), 156–157.

accompany the reading of Cioran's anthropological declarations, in which we read:

> I am a bit influenced by Taoism, which says that one should imitate water. Don't make any effort; look life calmly in the face. … Everything that man does ends like that. Everything ends up being stuck. That's humanity, the tragic aspect of history. Everything that man undertakes turns out just the opposite of what was planned. All of history has an ironic sense. And there will come a moment when man will achieve exactly the contrary of everything that he wanted. In a super-evident way … the emptiness which resembles boredom … is not at all a European experience. Fundamentally, it is Oriental. It is emptiness as something positive. It is how one heals everything.[33]

A universal therapy, healing everything, is supposed to depend on a total deconstruction. It is necessary to keep in mind that neither Cioran nor Toynbee and his interlocutor are postmodernists. They are only children of a time which experiences a cultural crisis, but is not able to find a new identity. Nonsense and irony then appear as attractive proposals. The alternative would be existential despair. That would undoubtedly be a more authentic witness to the spiritual drama of our time. Authenticity is, however, not the highest value among the supporters of the philosophy of the rhizome. The nomad fleeing from meaning and not knowing the destination of his wandering can still enjoy a lightness of a being which appears to external observers to be unbearable.

If the means for a rediscovery of the world of meaning, truth, and beauty are never found, then the earlier tragedy of the Neanderthals and of the dinosaurs would be the fate of our biological species as well. It might, unfortunately, turn out that, despite everything, the French structuralists were right when they said that the history of the universe, which began without man, will once again develop without him. Should their predictions be confirmed, we would have a case of self-extermination at the very request of the intellectual elite. But we must accept some responsibility for the present state of the development of culture through the small narratives of postmodernism and through the consideration of the great intellectual tradition of the past. On the other hand, we must definitively exclude from that tradition elements of

33 E. M. Cioran, *Entretiens avec François Bondy & al.* (Gallimard: Paris, 1995), 31, 58, 70–71.

ideology, which are an expression of entanglement in deep internal contradictions.

It is difficult not to admit that Agnieszka Kołakowska is right when she considers dogmatism to be an essential feature of deconstructive postmodernism.[34] If foundational theses are introduced, not only without taking the trouble to offer a rational justification, but even excluding *a priori* the very possibility of such a justification, such a practice deserves to be called dogmatism. If, on the one hand, the possibility of knowing the truth is excluded and knowledge is treated as a set of illusions, and, on the other hand, the acceptance of the assertions of postmodernism as unquestionable truths is expected, then it is difficult to recognize such an attitude as logical. If, finally, the grand narratives of the past are categorically rejected, and in their place are introduced funeral narratives about the death of God, man, and meaning, then it will be necessary to apply to oneself the critical considerations which were previously directed towards other narratives. The internal antinomies of deconstructive postmodernism are even more evident than the antinomies of the Enlightenment. A rational critique is supposed to reveal both types of oversimplifications and inconsistencies. For these very reasons, it is difficult to recognize the justification for the charge that modernity is guilty of an intellectual imperialism in which the human "I," searching for the center of history, generates successive versions of illusory interpretations.[35] Applying that same terminology, it is necessary to notice both the imperialism of nonsense and of nihilism, considered axiomatically as paramount values.

Jean-François Lyotard says that not only is it now necessary for us to renounce the search for grand narratives, but it is also necessary to notice that contemporary man has abandoned nostalgia for such searches. Meanwhile, one can notice that nostalgia does not have to be the ultimate criterion of truth in epistemology. At the time of Freud, Vienna recalled nostalgically the lost splendor of the empire and in the Weimar Republic broad social circles expressed their longing for a definitive solution to the Jewish problem. Nostalgia and longing bear witness to the spirit of an age, but they do not authorize one to draw conclusions that go any further than that. Moreover, in evaluating the conclusions of Lyotard, it is necessary to note the ambiguity of the phrase "contemporary man." Contemporary physicists, though striving to build a theory of superstrings, constantly search for a Theory of Everything, which is supposed provide an explanation of physical

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34 Agnieszka Kołakowska, "Czy możliwa jest religia postmodernistyczna?" *Znak* 53 (2001): 1: 43–55.

35 Cf. Charles Birch and John B. Cobb, Jr., *The Liberation of Life: From the Cell to the Community* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981).

effects in a way that combines quantum theory with cosmology. The complicated reality of the mutual relations shown by the various branches of mathematics can be subordinated to simple axioms. If someone were to attempt to see in such a practice signs of a scientific imperialism, then he would either be showing his scientific incompetence or substituting ideological classifications for substantive evaluations.

The latter appears without a doubt in postmodernism when the classical concept of truth is put into question and scientific theories are treated in a purely expressive way, i.e., as a form of expression of feelings similar to those found in poetry, literature, and art. On that view, science is criticized in the same way in which metaphysics was once criticized by logical positivists. In their theory, however, it was possible to oppose to a purely expressive metaphysics and poetry a cognitively valuable physics. In the postmodernist critique, only expression exists and the classical concept of truth disappears. The problem is that that critique gets entangled in internal contradictions. Even in the texts of Lyotard containing a critique of grand narratives there appears an implicit narrative about justice and social liberation. Mini-narratives, in which the author recognizes as true information concerning certain scientific discoveries, accompany that hidden narrative.[36]

For the lightness of postmodernist declarations loses its charm when we subject it to the same rules of logical evaluation which deconstructionists apply to classical systems of ideas. We should not, however, trivialize the intensity of the authentic experience which we find in many versions of postmodernism. Such an experience is moving evidence of the interaction between the human person and the rapid transformations of the culture. Paraphrasing Eco, it would be possible to say: That about which we cannot theorize, we have to experience. The essence of that experience cannot be neutral for philosophical reflection about God. Our thought develops in the context of participation. The drama and pain accompanying the search for a new identity in a changeable world limits the horizon of reflection, the ignoring of which by theologians would constitute a sin of intellectual omission.

Witnesses of Meaning

The death of God, the death of man, and the death of meaning cause one another. When traditional discussion about God turns out to be empty and unconvincing, then the language of evidence acquires

36 Cf. William A. Beardslee, "Christ in the Postmodern Age: Reflections Inspired by Jean-François Lyotard," in VPT, 70.

particular weight. That is why the example of Mother Theresa and the style of John Paul II have had such a decided influence on our time. Their influence cannot in the least be contrasted to classical means of argumentation which would introduce artificial and unjustified oppositions. Therefore, it is necessary to note that in both cases, the evidence of influence is so easy to see because the conduct of life is accompanied by a clear and understandable theoretical interpretation. The logic of evidence does not presuppose a *kenosis* of meaning, but only goes beyond the closed space of purely rational means of proof. What would be sound would be not so much statements about the *kenosis* of rational means of proof, as statements about the fulfillment and development of those means at the level of praxis, embracing the entire reality of an attitude to life.[37]

The existential component has always played an important role in religious experience. Even the most rationalistic versions of theism, however, do not say that it would be possible to reduce the attitude of faith to the affirmation of a set of justified propositions. The essence of the experience of faith remains the relation of the love of God as a person. Along with it comes an attitude of trust, the overcoming of fear and anxiety, and spiritual consolation. St. Thomas the Apostle finds that attitude not in a logical analysis of information concerning the Resurrection of Jesus, but in the existential touching of His wounds. The logic of wounds reveals a new reality of meaning, inaccessible at the level of purely rational search. Postmodernism's appreciation of extrarational forms of discovering meaning can also turn out to be an important form of expressing the content essential to our experience of religious faith.

The process of secularization is sometimes understood as the disappearance of a clear feeling of subjectivity and of a clear understanding of truth and values. The dominant experience connected with secularization is one of the boundaries and limitations of human existence leading to various versions of nihilism, which appears as the heart of the secularized Christian message. The cultural *kenosis* of God unavoidably brings with it a *kenosis* of classical axiology and meaning. Our responsibility for the shape of the world of human values in the third millennium depends to a large degree on taking into consideration the fundamental relation between the Divine Absolute and the contingency of our existence. In constructive postmodernism, it is

37 The opposite opinion, in which, in the name of personal testimony, the role of rational means is discredited is defended by, among others, Émile Poulat, *L'ère postchrétienne: Un monde sorti de Dieu* (Paris: Flammarion, 1994).

necessary to overcome above all the overconcentration of our attention on that which is contingent.

IX. THE CULTURAL *KENOSIS* OF GOD

In Search of a Heavenly Heteropolis

The untypical situation of culture at the turn of the millennium is perfectly characterized by the author of an anthology devoted to postmodernist thought on religious problems. He writes:

> At the end of modernity we come, I believe, to a forking of the ways. The primrose path is the aesthetics of nihilism in its various contemporary forms: a culture of seduction and flagrant, self-consuming sexuality; a culture of increasingly sophisticated drugs and drug use; a culture of virtual, video-taped realities. The thorny way is the practice of faith. The latter is a difficult path, fraught still with all the dragons, giants, and demons of *The Pilgrim's Progress*.… We proceed by grace. We cannot take command here—forging a way through difficulties and reducing mountains to mole-hills. We have to be held in love, waiting patiently, watching constantly, tracing endlessly the invisible as the visible, the divine as the corporeal, the coming to fulfillment of the eternal Word. The task of understanding those relationships is also part of postmodernism's theological project. There is so much more of this other city, this heteropolis, yet to be built and yet to be explored.[1]

At the new stage of the search among the labyrinths of the contemporary city appear the descendants of "a wandering Aramaean" (Deuteronomy 26: 5) to search for a new heaven and a new earth (Revelation 21: 1) along the path of Christian nomads. On the path leading towards a new city, the Divine heteropolis, the teacher of faith for them continues to be Abraham, who listens to the Divine call to set out for the land of which he was to take possession: "he went out, not knowing where he was to go" (Hebrews 11: 8). Among unknown teachers of complete trust in God were the witnesses to faith who "… went about … destitute, afflicted, ill-treated—of whom the world was not worthy—wandering over deserts and mountains, and in dens and

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1 Graham Ward, "Introduction: or, A Guide to Theological Thinking in Cyberspace," in PG, xliii.

caves of the earth" (Hebrews 11: 37–38). Thus, the drama of nomads who feel like strangers in the world of everyday appearances did not begin with the generation of Deleuze. The problem, nevertheless, remains that earlier generations of exiled wanderers were able to preserve their faith in an invisible world of Divine values. Their testimony to faith and meaning was possible thanks to the fact that they were able to be witnesses of the *kenosis* of a God who is hidden in the heart of human failures and absurdities, but is present in a world witnessing historical crises. Their spiritual world was not dependent on political events; neither was it a well-ordered world of logical deductions. It was necessary to preserve a hope against hope (Romans 4: 18) among the emptiness and darkness of the steppe, struggling with God through the night, as did Jacob at the stream of Jabbok (Genesis 32: 25–32), listening as Elijah to the "still small voice" announcing the nearness of God (1 Kings 19: 12). Surrender and escape into loss, then, appear to be overeasy solutions.

The necessity of facing new cultural challenges and undertaking a new search for evidence of faith in qualitatively new conditions is not, therefore, exclusively the experience of our generation. Even the Promised Land seemed to Abraham to be a foreign land (Hebrews 11: 9). He experienced no easy psychological satisfaction when he pitched his tents in an unknown land. The important difference between Abraham and Odysseus was manifested in the fact that Odysseus was wandering towards his beloved Ithaca, preserving its memory vividly in his mind and searching longingly for its familiar outline. In Abraham's wandering, there is no such romantic component. Certainly he remembers the land from which he came, and he identifies his history with the history of the land of his fathers, a history marking the beginning of his great journey. In place of romantic nostalgia for Ithaca, there appears to him a great unknown, through which God leads, expecting a fidelity stronger than longing and much more radical than the measured constructions of logic.

To live the faith of Abraham is to be ready at a day's notice to pack the tents symbolizing everything that is dear to one and to go to a new, unknown place, which God will indicate, completely independently of rational calculations or our emotional predilections. To live the faith of Abraham in the cultural context of postmodernity is to be able calmly to pack up the tents of congenial concepts and arguments, not in order to set out on a desert path, but to set them up again in a different context and in a different form, in a place indicated by God. In an Abrahamic testimony of faith, one may not lose heart on account of the wildness of new places or on account of a feeling of loneliness in a foreign landscape. We must constantly seek the face of the Lord (Psalms 27: 8), listening carefully to His voice, which could be

either a discreet whisper or a delicate breeze (1 Kings 19: 12). We need to love God more than the logic of convincing deductions and the collection of respected authorities, to which we like to refer in times of difficulty. We need to accept the provisionality of contingent means, in order that the Divine Absolute might all the more clearly reveal in them his power. Only then does the contemporary "wandering Aramaean" reveal the style in which, amidst the darkness of our doubt, flashes the light of the great adventure of our faith.

In our cultural wanderings, which have as a background a pluralism of deeply different ideas, we need a feeling of identity defined by a constant reference to the tasks which Christ sets before us. Without reference to Christ, one cannot understand the truth about man or about his life-exile. Therefore, the solution of the main problems of contemporary postmodernism must be sought in anthropology, which takes into consideration the fundamental directedness of human existence to God.

The intense course of cultural transformations destroyed the feeling of identity, traditionally connected with the style of life of beings called *animal rationale*. Traditional conceptions of truth, rationality, and the criteria of meaning were subjected to deep changes. In place of an earlier experience of the harmony of the world there appeared the experience of emptiness and despair. In place of a being rooted in a world of values, there appeared as a model of the new style the cosmic nomad, wandering through the world without a destination or guideposts. At a certain stage, the intellectual games accompanying the discovery of possible names of the rose was offered to him as one of his main occupations. Hermeneutics is not, however, the most appropriate occupation for nomads. Some varieties of roses can, in addition, distressingly call to mind the tree of knowledge. Therefore, supporters of interpretive radicalism quickly introduced the rhizome in place of the rose. The complex structure of the rhizome remains a symbol of life which cannot be subordinated to earlier models of order and harmony. We "rhizomites," in the chaos of sensations and desires, can still follow Dionysus in joint intoxication, in order to alleviate successive waves of pain and to forget all the bright values of modernity.

Abraham also experienced complex life-situations, the symbol of which could have been the rhizome. The complexity of the rhizome of life does not, however, prejudge the real character of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. The problem is to be able to combine the openness to the reality carried by those two symbols. This requires the overcoming of a Christianity of simple schemata and glib formulas. It requires openness to the fascinating reality of grace, which cannot be expressed in any one intellectual tradition with its closed set of terms. Fidelity to the vocation of a Christian is expressed in the courage to

wander to new lands pointed out by God. It also requires a feeling of distance from the reality which even yesterday was our dearest homeland. We find that very attitude in the testimony of the primitive Church, preserved in "The Epistle to Diognetus,"

> For the Christians are distinguished from other men neither by country, nor language, nor the customs which they observe. … They dwell in their own countries, but simply as sojourners. As citizens, they share in all things with others, and yet endure all things as if foreigners. Every foreign land is to them as their native country, and every land of their birth as a land of strangers.[2]

A zone of foreignness with respect to those concepts which even yesterday delineated the proximate horizon of our wanderings and actions is part of the testimony to our faith. When we listen carefully to the Divine voice leading us to new lands, we are not permitted to absolutize the experiences of yesterday. We must bravely undertake new challenges, considering unknown lands to be Divine land, where we are needed with our testimony to faith. Therefore, in the vast expanse of new cultural ideas, we must open ourselves to the inspirations of the Holy Spirit. We must bear witness to the clear voice of the Apostle of Nations, directed from the Athenian Areopagus also to us, in opposition to contemporary attempts at the commodification of culture. With that voice, Christianity bravely undertakes new challenges of inculturation, giving witness to the *kenosis* of a God hidden in the heart of postmodernist culture.

Purity of Heart in Postmodernity

Both our prayer and our method of philosophizing about God remain manifestations of our existential situation; it is not possible to separate them from the experience of life's fascinations and dramas. The conceptual categories by which we try to express the richness of our bond to God are not only components of the discourse of theoreticians considering subtle academic questions. There is in them also a call from the depths of pain. The sphere of our experiences has an important influence not only on our vision of God, but also on the language in which we try to express both the truths we are learning about God and

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2 "The Epistle of Mathetes to Diognetus," 5, in Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, eds., *The Ante-Nicene Fathers: Translations of the Writings of the Fathers down to A.D. 325* (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans, 1978-).

our daily love of Him. That truth was constantly emphasized in Augustinian theology. An insightful development of this theology is provided by the works of Johann Hessen (d. 1971) and Fr. Jerzy Szymik (b. 1953).[3] On the view taken by both those authors, a central truth of theological epistemology is expressed in the formula of the evangelical Beatitude: "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God" (Matthew 5: 8). Our image of God depends in large degree on the set of those existential behaviors and evaluations which were metaphorically called "purity of heart."

Evangelical purity of heart includes both an attitude of respect for certain existential values and moral principles as well as respect for the linguistic means by which we search for the truth. There is both a feeling of the fragility of our being and an awareness of the imperfection of all conceptual means when we want to relate them to the being of God. There is in it an authenticity when we try sincerely to express our feelings of the tragedy and the pain of life. And finally, there is in it a humility inspiring a contemplative openness to the reality of God, who fascinates with the infinite richness of His nature and draws our attention away from ourselves and from the cognitive means which we use. In that cognitive perspective, "contemplation of God" is not reserved for specialists in rational discourse; it is also not a simple function of a perfect conceptual apparatus. God enters onto the horizon of our enchantment with holiness and of our experience of beauty. We discover Him in human goodness and in the struggles of life's Gethsemane. A contemplative respect for the work of creation and a specially-organized community of sensitive persons filled with idealism bring Him closer to us.

The encyclical *Fides et Ratio* emphasizes that important dependency, following the Book of Wisdom (13: 5). It is thanks to reflection open to the greatness and beauty of creatures that we know their Creator. The danger occurs, that if we impoverish the sphere of the experience of human beauty and we treat man himself reductionistically as a one-dimensional being, then the consequence of such an impoverishment of the human world will be an impoverished and schematic theology. John Paul II warns us about such a danger in his message to the participants in the Congress of Christian Culture in Lublin. He points out an alternative in the polyphonic, multi-dimensional culture which fulfills "the whole man in his transcendence of things," and because of which it does not allow him to dissolve in

3 Jerzy Szymik, *Teologia w krainie pepsi-coli* (Warsaw: Biblioteka Więzi, 1999), 81–84.

materialism and consumerism.[4] The human aspiration for transcendence is manifested both in rational thought and in artistic creativity. We find in the Pope's appraisal of man's rational endeavors an affirmation of the great human anxieties, expression of which is provided by "literature and music, art, sculpture and architecture." Marked by the stigma of contingency, man has expressed in those arts a passion-filled longing for infinity. We find that same longing in its most rationalistic form in the philosophy born of the desire "to rise beyond what is contingent and set out towards the infinite."[5] On that view, it is not possible, without silencing our cognitive passions, to avoid the great questions about the meaning of life and its direction, the inevitability of death, and hope for immortality.[6] It is not possible to reduce those questions to the level of "small narratives." Those latter, however, can also turn out to be useful in the deeper discovery of Divine mysteries and in the search for new linguistic forms which allow us to formulate better our relationship to the Divine Thou.

The depth of the theological image of God depends on the vastness of the world which we discover. Threats to that vastness are, on the one hand, cultural schemata in which the rich reality of human experience is reduced to one type of experience. On the other hand, affiliation with one intellectual tradition as though it alone brings a satisfactory expression of the truth about the infinite God is also a danger. Opposition to evangelical purity of heart is, among other things, an attitude of intellectual self-satisfaction in which we concentrate greater attention on our perfection than on God Himself. The encyclical *Fides et Ratio* warns against that last attitude, drawing our attention to the danger of "philosophical pride." This is manifested in the absolutization of one's own cognitive perspective and in the elevation of its conclusions to the level of a universally recognized philosophical interpretation despite their evident imperfection. Such an attitude, so often practiced in the many varied schools and traditions, is considered by John Paul II to be a disquieting manifestation of the practice of subordinating human thought to the narrow requirements of a system, renouncing thereby the fundamental truth about the cognitive primacy of thought.[7]

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4 John Paul II, "List do uczestników Kongresu Kultury Chrześcijańskiej," in Ryszard Rubinkiewicz and Stanisław Zięba, eds., *Sacrum i kultura: chrześcijańskie korzenie przyszłości; materiały Kongresu kultury chrześcijańskiej, Lublin, 15-17 września 2000* (Lublin: Towarzystwo Naukowe Katolickiego Uniwersytetu Lubelskiego, 2000), 4.

5 FeR, ¶24.

6 FeR, ¶26.

7 FeR, ¶4.

Being able to accept Divine truth in a spirit of trusting humility means opening oneself to the full range of means by which God shows us that truth. Intellectual humility is manifested then in the fact that we love the complexity and the richness of the truth shown to us by God more than we love our own simple intellectual schemata. In his appeal to philosophers, John Paul II does not offer an apotheosis of any one system of thought, but emphasizes that it is above all necessary to form a consciousness of truth as a value and a sensitivity to the good contained in that truth.

In words directed to scientists, the Pope, expressing solidarity and recognition for their research, urges them to maintain an openness beyond the sphere of their own specialization, to the aspect of wisdom found in their work. It embraces the great questions which go beyond the cognitive possibilities of the natural sciences but which have great importance in the formation both of the human personality and of man's openness to Mystery.[8] In the request addressed to *everyone*, the Pope calls for an attitude of opposition to the influential illusions of the contemporary world. We create that attitude by cooperation in the perpetual search for truth and meaning, accepting a model of life in which man is not a being uprooted from values or renouncing the rational interpretations of the transformations he experiences. The greatness of man can be realized in his intellectual integration. Its manifestation is the fact that *animal rationale*, in his search for meaning is "choosing to enter the truth, to make a home under the shade of Wisdom and dwell there."[9]

Searching for the linguistic means which bring closer to our contemporaries the truth about a loving God, we must remember both those formed by positivist models of rationality and the creators of culture who, aspiring to artistic expression, feel an instinctive fear of rationality. In the pluralistic influence of diverse intellectual traditions, we often meet at present people to whom the language of classical theism does not speak. They do not reject the arguments elaborated in that tradition. They only say that a certain type of discourse does not speak to them, just as classical music does not speak to those who began their musical education with rock.

As an example of such an attitude, combining integrity of life with a feeling of intellectual responsibility, we can cite the case of Professor Izydora Dąmbska and her critical evaluations of Thomistic arguments for the existence of God. Referring to the argument from motion as formalized by Fr. Jan Salamucha, she asserted that she did not see any deficiency in the formalization, but she does not interpret the

8 FeR, ¶106.
9 FeR, ¶107.

formalization in terms of the recognition of the existence of the God about whom the Christian faith speaks. Speaking about God in terms of an unmoved mover is completely foreign to her linguistic tradition and therefore the formalized discourse of Thomism remains for her intellectually empty.

In the face of such skeptical commentaries, one should not try to convince skeptics at all costs that it is their fault that certain types of argumentation appear to them to be psychologically foreign or semantically empty. In the philosophical house of our Father, there are many mansions. Christianity, announcing the eternal Divine truth, has made use of a variety of systems which take into consideration various types of human experiences. The problem that now returns many times in various centers of Christian thought is the fundamental question: In what language should one speak the truth about the saving God to those whose mentality is formed by the deep cultural transformations of postmodernity?

The fact that the problems experienced by Professor Dąmbska are not in the least idiosyncratic is shown by the admissions of many other intellectuals, who, in the thicket of philosophical systems, have tried to find a style and a language which show the living truth about God. One can cite the statement of Cardinal Jean-Marie Lustiger as typical. The Archbishop of Paris, recalling the years of searching during his youth, confesses, among other things:

> … for two years, I struggled between the two worlds: between the world of contemporary culture from which I had come—that of Marxism and existentialism—and the neo-Thomist world of my seminary professors. At that time, I read Maritain, Gilson and the history of philosophy from a Thomist point of view. But I was questioning whether Thomism was a philosophy or a theology that assimilates the elements of a philosophy. I could not understand how men of the twentieth century could pretend, after the stringencies of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, to construct a philosophy on the basis of what was obviously a theological synthesis.
>
> Consequently, I did not become a neo-Scholastic. The role given to rational demonstration seemed to be excessive. And, in my opinion, this type of thought does not give sufficient recognition to history's role, which is so important in the Jewish and Christian experience. Moreover, if carried to its conclusion, a certain affirmation of nature—of its specificity and sufficiency—could lead to the conclusion that the

> relationship to God is superfluous, indeed, alienating. The danger is not imaginary. Is it not true that the feeling that God is man's rival (what I give to God, I take away from man) has permeated the Christian West since the fourteenth century? I know very well that this is not Saint Thomas' position; it is even a nominalist theory that he opposed. But how many Scholastics (indeed, Thomists) are nominalists? The Lutherans and the Jansenists believed that they could affirm God's sovereignty only to man's detriment. And, conversely, rationalism thought that it could affirm man only by destroying God. Maritain saw this danger, and he speaks about it in *Integral Humanism.*[10]

Once again, it is characteristic that in Lustiger's search for a new form of discourse about God the main role was played by anthropological arguments. The hierarchy of truths, criteria of meaning, and the distinctive feature of culture are expressed in relation to the human person and his fundamental bond with God. The origin of the radical postulates of postmodernism have to be explained in the context of the deep crisis in contemporary philosophical anthropology. In the classical tradition, the attempt was made to interpret social and cultural changes by taking into consideration the rich world of the human person, as understood in the rationalist categories of the thought of Boethius and in relation to the supernatural dignity of man. At the present time, reversing the order of dependency, the attempt is made to define, or even to deconstruct, the world of the human person in the context of a cultural chaos which brings a blurring of fundamental values and a deep crisis of man's identity. In the changed perspective, the place of rational argument is taken by rhetorical declarations. Friedrich Nietzsche appears most often as the master of the new style practiced amidst ruins which are the result of the programmatic application of the techniques of deconstruction. In fact, the mentality of the beginning of the twenty-first century differs fundamentally from the ideas which were predominant at the end of the nineteenth; certain declarations, however, remain unchangeably attractive to those who learned from Nietzsche's protest against philosophy and theology as classically understood.

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10 Jean-Marie Lustiger, *Choosing God, Chosen by God: Conversations with Jean-Marie Lustiger*, trans. Rebecca Howell Balinski (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1991), 134–135.

The Semantic Death of Nietzsche

"There is no such thing either as the truth of Nietzsche, or of Nietzsche's text.… Indeed, there is no such thing as a truth in itself. But only a surfeit of it."[11] The assertion of Derrida just cited, being a logical application of his conception of the reading of texts, expresses, in essence, a declaration of the death of Nietzsche. Since there are no reasons to prefer any one way of reading the texts of that German philosopher, Nietzsche comes down from the pedestal of the prophet of the third millennium and becomes a producer of texts, which, in the framework of a theory of the surfeit of truth, each person can read in accordance with his current needs, his fancy, or his intentions. In the multiplicity of truths created by deconstruction, Nietzsche's dramatic cry becomes only one of an infinite number of possible readings of his text. Nietzsche himself, entangled in mutually contradictory declarations, perplexed and tragic, becomes even more tragic after the application to his texts of the Derridean technique of free readings, which of its very nature cannot claim to provide the one adequate interpretation of the text. A consistent development of "Western logocentrism"[12] leads to the destruction of the semantic identity of the texts which lay at the foundations of deconstructive postmodernism and to the blurring of the identity of trends connected to Nietzsche's thought. One can call that the semantic death of Nietzsche. That same process can also be called the birth of the Nietzsche of the postmodernists, who appears in a countless number of forms. In the semantics of blurred meaning, births turn out to be indistinguishable from deaths, and, against a background of declarations about the new religion of Dionysian intoxication with life, appears unexpectedly the coffin portrait of Dionysus.

The application of Derridean techniques of deconstruction to the trivializations of the work of Nietzsche would be an occupation decidedly too easy in a discussion of the ideas of contemporary postmodernism. Among those ideas we find a fascination with the beauty of life, experienced even in those situations in which pain goes along with intoxication and an inebriated ecstasy allows one to rise above the experience of the brutality of the world. From the fact that Nietzsche himself, identifying with Dionysus, opposed the theology of the Cross and was a systematic opponent of Christ, one cannot draw the conclusion that fluctuations in his views—between despair, rebellion,

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11 Jacques Derrida, *Spurs: Nietzsche's Styles*, trans. Barbara Harlow (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 103.

12 Francis Guibal and Stanislas Breton, *Altérités: Jacques Derrida et Pierre-Jean Labarrière* (Paris: Osiris, 1986), 79–83.

and fascination—must of their essence contradict Christianity. In that case one must admit that Derrida is right to say that the views of the author of *The Gay Science* admit of so many interpretations that it is difficult to speak about one canonical version.

On a sympathetic interpretation, it would be possible to think that the Basel philologist spoke only as a critic of a theology in which God appears as a ruthless, unfeeling judge and not as love personified. If we recognize that the God of the Gospel is love, then the first principle of Christian ethics is the principle of love of neighbor. Renunciation becomes the cost of that love only when one can, in the words of Fr. Wacław Hryniewicz,[13] eliminate the facile opposition between Dionysus and Christ and accept the possibility of a reconciliation of Christian love with Christian sacrifice. The expression of that unity will be a Christianity of the gift which appears in our experience to be both a gift of love and a gift of suffering. Recognizing that a gift of self, taken to the extreme of pain, becomes an expression of our love, it is difficult to agree with Michał Markowski when, in his own attempt to develop Hryniewicz's thought, he advances the opinion that "the Christian theology of sacrifice and suffering is a pernicious interpretation of the teachings of Jesus. It is pernicious because it is directed towards the intensification of pain and not towards its elimination."[14] Perhaps it would be possible to avoid that conflict if the author had not introduced a universal quantifier, but had specified the concrete type of theology which he was talking about. Instead, he introduces rhetorical generalizations of the type: "the magic circle of the sacrifice is not the open space of the gift." The problem is what one is to understand by "magic circle," an expression which the theologians being criticized do not use.

In the oversimplified critique of sacrifice, each form of pain or affirmed suffering can appear as a manifestation of an anti-Dionysian approach. Meanwhile, such an axiology meets with radical opposition in the testimony of the leading creators of culture. Zbigniew Herbert, in his poem *To Piotr Vujičić* writes explicitly:

> explain to others
> that I had a wonderful life
> I suffered

13 Wacław Hryniewicz, OMI, "Czy Bogu potrzebne są ofiary?" *Tygodnik Powszechny* (14 January 2001), 8 ff.

14 Michał P. Markowski, "Ekonomia ofiary, rozrzutność daru," *Tygodnik Powszechny* (21 January 2001), 8.

Czesław Miłosz emphasizes the Christological dimension of suffering even more, pointing to analogies between the Incarnation of God and the limitations borne by our corporeality: "It is my ailment that makes me sensitive to the suffering of crucifixion more than to the triumphant Christ" and "the mystery of existence is ever more the mystery of suffering."[15] We find that same hierarchy of values in Herbert's teacher—Henryk Elzenberg—in a principle which by no means makes suffering something to be proud of, says "I suffer, therefore I am."[16] Herbert himself, emphasizing his intellectual dependence on Elzenberg wrote:

> Whom would I have become, had I not met you—
> my Master Henryk
> […]
> I would have been a silly boy to the end of my life
> […]
> Who does not know[17]

The attempt to make a programmatic elimination of suffering from our lives can lead to an immature Christianity on the level of a "silly boy who does not know." A calm and mature acceptance of suffering leads, however, to an axiological horizon in which the justification of our fidelity and the fundamental test of the truth of being remains the ability to undergo suffering and sacrifice. Fr. Józef Tischner showed that truth in a particularly clear way in his life. The three years of his suffering from disease was for many commentators a time of discovery of a new side of Tischner. His way of enduring his life crisis was more convincing than had been his earlier lectures. Tischner, through his diffusion of optimism, could for a long time have been counted among the representatives of the Dionysian style in philosophy. The last years of his life showed how many oversimplifications a simple opposition between the joy of Dionysus and the Cross of Christ brings.

The proposal to reduce Christianity to an affirmative poetics of life, in which pain and sacrifice are unknown, is categorically rejected in the great cultural tradition. It finds its classical expression in Antigone's protest against the cautions of Ismene, who is afraid that the language which we accept can inappropriately "fan the pain into flame," and

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15 Cited by Jerzy Szymik, *Eseje o nadziei* (Wrocław: Tum, 2001), 80.

16 Lesław Hostyński discusses this problem in detail in "Herberta metafizyka cierpienia a filozofia Henryka Elzenberga," *Ethos* 52 (2000): 126–136.

17 Zbigniew Herbert, "Do Henryka Elzenberga w stulecie Jego urodzin," in *Rovigo* (Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Dolnośląskie, 1992), 5.

suggests that a zone of silence should programmatically embrace the sphere of human pain. In Miłosz's version, dedicated to the Hungarian workers of 1956, Antigone's protest is as follows:

> To accept everything as one accepts
> Summer following spring and winter, fall,
> To look on human affairs with indifference
> As on succession in mindless nature?
> While I live, I will cry out: No.
> And I do not want any of your consolations,
> Flowers on a spring night, nightingales,
> Neither sun nor clouds nor friendly rivers,
> Nothing. Leave unalleviated
> What happened and what will happen,
> The only thing worth remembering is: our pain.[18]

The pain of Antigone, the only thing worth remembering, is not a manifestation of a philosophy that makes a show of suffering, but a manifestation of the attitude of the gift. Those two factors must complete one another in a human life if we are to avoid a one-dimensional anthropology. For the facile introduction of oppositions between a Christianity of joy and a Christianity of sacrifice would be a mistake. A joyful Dionysus cannot be a jesting fellow to whom reflection on the meaning of suffering and the value of sacrifice is alien. For that would lead to a reductionist anthropology where the joy of life is mass-produced as is the kitsch that decorates shopping centers. It is a separate problem whether any creative components of the kind which Nietzsche first introduced into the history of ideas will necessarily be found in the Franciscan-Dionysian version of Christianity. Perhaps we can count among them the explicitly Nietzschean experience of the pain of life expressed both in the deep laceration of consciousness and in the tragic exclamations: "Oh, come you back, Mine unfamiliar God! my pain! My final bliss!"[19] In the intellectual landscape of postmodernity, indifference and irony appear as the decisive factors in the skeptical attitude towards faith. In that context, Nietzschean experience of the pain of life, of passion, of tragedy, and of loneliness appear as a deeply human element among the bored glorifiers of a deconstruction proposing the next variety of carefree play with the text. Nietzsche, sentenced to semantic death by the followers of his thought, appears as a living witness of the spiritual perplexity on the path of the search for a

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18 Czesław Miłosz, *Kontynenty* (Cracow: Znak, 1999), 447.

19 Thomas Common, trans., *Thus Spoke Zarathustra: A Book for All and None,* §65.

lost God. The cultural *kenosis* of God is finally manifested in the fact that texts proclaiming His death turn out to be omens of the paradoxes of a reborn Christianity. On the path of such paradoxes, the death of God is precisely an introduction into the mystery of the Resurrection.

The Return of the *Sacrum*

In many earlier predictions characterizing the state of culture at the end of the twentieth century, the conviction was expressed that the decisive culture-creating factor of our time would be a pragmatic consumerism dependent on the achievements of science and technology. Without a doubt, consumptionism exists today. That phenomenon is, however, subordinated to the laws of the market and artificially strengthened with the help of advertisements. The contemporary return of the *sacrum*, expressed even at the level of the substitutes for metaphysics and mysticism offered by the New Age, remains, however, a surprise for purely naturalistic anthropologies. The very fact that human longings cannot be reduced to the level of pragmatics and consumption reveals a deep truth about man as *animal religiosum*. At the same time, however, it is necessary to take into consideration the fact that the mentality formed in a postmodernist culture has an important bearing on the search for the *sacrum* and on the way of experiencing openness to Divine transcendence. Christianity does not absolutize the forms by which the ideals of the Gospel enter everyday human life. At a certain stage, those ideals were revealed in the lonely struggles of the Desert Fathers; at another, in the teaching of itinerant monks; and today—in the evangelizing possibilities of the Internet.

Without a doubt, not every game of paradoxes and not every departure from the principles of classical logic will lead to a model of spirituality in agreement with the rich tradition of Christianity. Paradoxes referring to the thought of the East, of which there are so many in the work of Anthony de Mello, do not fulfill that condition and, in concrete formulations, turn out to be inconsistent with the spiritual tradition of Christianity.[20] On the other hand, the works of Meister Eckhart can be classical examples of a tradition of spirituality which differ from the dominant standards of the time. Those very works, like *The Cloud of Unknowing*, had an important influence on the spirituality of many persons for whom the experience of the mystery of Divine

20 Another problem is whether that incoherence is the result of essential features of de Mello's thought or mainly of the fact that, in the hurried preparation of his texts for publication, both the letter and the spirit of those texts were frequently distorted. I personally know of examples of distortions which grieved de Mello.

being is perfected rather by means of negation and contrast than by means of positive statement.

Similarly, at the present stage of the development of culture, we must search for new creative forms of the expression of truths which do not adequately reach today's recipients in their traditional form. Some proposals concerning postmodernist spirituality show such a possibility and should not be rejected *a priori*. In that sense, the message of the encyclical *Fides et ratio* creates for us a new perspective on joining the richness of contemporary cultural trends to the search for new models of prayer, in which a bond between *fides* and *oratio*, which is close to the contemporary mentality, appears as a central task.

The Upper Room or the Tower of Babel?

Dionysian wine is not a threat to the vision of the world inspired by the Gospel. The joy of Cana and the proclamation of the heavenly banquet (Mark 14: 25) are a permanent element of that vision. At the same time, however, in the perspective of the Upper Room, wine is changed into the blood of Christ poured out for the salvation of the world (Mark 14: 23 ff.). The reduction of Christianity to the level of the first miracle at Cana would mean the impoverishment of its content. The central texts of the synoptic Gospels include the description of Last Supper, when that wine would be changed into the blood of Christ. Essential truths are also taught by the description of the darkness of the Garden of Gethsemane, where the sweat of Christ was changed into blood. To distinguish where there was sweat, and where tears, and where blood, was already impossible then, and not only because of the darkness. Later, after the piercing of His side on the hill of Golgotha, the difference disappeared: blood and water flowed together (John 19: 34), showing the great paradoxes of Divine acts of salvation. The Gospel shows us the unexpected unity of the paradoxes, which is able to surprise even supporters of postmodernistic combinations. At the center of those paradoxes is found the Upper Room. In its message, the testimony of the infinite love of God predominates over the sacrifice which will appear as a consequence of the infinite love of God for man. The Beloved Disciple, who had a privileged place at the Last Supper, towards the end of his life, would always return to that exceptional situation, revealing the truth about the love of God expressed both in the Upper Room and in the pain of His death on the Cross (1 John 4: 7–12). The attempt to express the proportion between love and sacrifice, like the attempt to make a Dionysian reduction of Christianity to the level of the wedding feast at Cana, conceals within itself a particular dose of anthropomorphism in which man tries to force on God the means of salvation which he believes to be particularly appropriate. The

consequence of such an approach could be, at the most, a return to Feuerbach, for whom God is created in our image and likeness. If we recognize that God is greater than our logic, and than our common sense preferences, then we should not overvalue the conditions, which our logic would force on the Lord God.

It is characteristic that the very mystery of the Upper Room awaited particular elaborations in the works of Catherine Pickstock, who represents constructive postmodernism. Referring to the term "the logic of desire," which was elaborated by Deleuze and Guattari, she analyzes the element of human narration and of the very words of Christ, in order to magnify the mystery hidden in the events of the Last Supper. Showing the difference in perspectives which can be accepted in the reconstruction of those very events, the author of *Writing Liturgy* asserts:

> Premodern language reflected a sacral universe in which all elements formed a constitutive part of the greater whole, and in which one element recalled another.… Christ's use of asyndeton at the Last Supper is a reminder in every liturgical performance that human reason is incomplete, and that the world of praise is never finished.… Christ is often represented as a madman. The insanity of the Cross, the non-sense of sacrifice, was a wisdom which drowned in the "rationality" of the world, and revealed there its non-sense.[21]

Such considerations can be shocking against the background of a tradition which pathetically proclaims the death of God, of man, of truth, and of meaning. Conceptual categories elaborated far from theological problems turn out to be useful in the consideration of the important truths of Christianity. Such an application should not surprise us, if those categories arose as an authentic reaction to the qualitatively new situations brought by the development of culture. Independently of the intention declared by particular authors, the world of truth and meaning is governed by objective laws which Popper described in his ontology of World Three. Postmodernism would be the philosophy of

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21 Catherine Pickstock, "Ansyndeton: Syntax and Insanity," in PG, 311. An asyndeton is a compact syntactic construction characterized by a lack of conjunctions between coordinated parts of a statement (e.g., "I came, I saw, I conquered."). The author takes into consideration two different versions of asyndetonic construction in her analysis of Jesus' words of institution of the Eucharist.

self-destruction if we programmatically excluded the possibility of the philosophical discovery of meaning and truth. The antinomies of postmodernism presented in the previous chapters of this work show only that, in the past, certain of its trends were rather literary than philosophical proposals. The deconstructionist oscillations between rhetoric and semiotics were as a rule closer to art than to metaphysics. The latter most often occurs in a hidden form. Extensive works concerning theological themes in constructive postmodernism bear witness to an important change of situation in the final years of the previous century.[22]

At a time which ostentatiously shows its antipathy to grand narratives, we should not expect that everyone will show an interest in a comprehensive course of metaphysics presented in the framework of the great philosophical systems. However it is necessary in such a situation also to appreciate the raising of concrete questions at the level of the small narratives which sensitize us to the ethical, axiological, or metaphysical aspects of our existence. We find in them reflections on the return of religion into secularized modernity, on "a dormant trace … reawakened" or on the rediscovery of the plausibility of religion.[23] That does not mean, of course, that every text in which the dogmas of deconstructive postmodernism are overcome is of use to Christian theism. It means only that, in philosophical discourse about God, the multiplicity of languages is a natural phenomenon and by no means must lead to a new kind of Tower of Babel. The Christian experience of the unity of the Upper Room of Pentecost did not come with a unification of language. In the multiplicity of various languages, the Spirit of Truth led his Church along paths on which the simple logic of syllogisms failed. In the experience of our disappointments with modernity that very same Spirit of Truth invariably carries out his work. The content of his message can be found also in the pain of Nietzsche and in the rhizomes of life well-known to the nomads of Deleuze. We need once again the particular gifts of the Spirit, in order that the variety of incomprehensible languages does not become associated with a postmodern version of the Tower of Babel.

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22 Cf., for example, Denis Müller, "La théologie postmoderne constructive et la situation actuelle de l'éthique théologique," in TeP, 213–228; Guido Vergauwen, "Faire la théologie aujourd'hui: Le catholicisme en condition de postmodernité," in TeP, 229–252.

23 Cf. the responses of Vattimo ("The Trace of the Trace") and Gargani ("Religious Experience as Event and Interpretation") in Jacques Derrida and Gianni Vattimo, eds., *Religion* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), 79 and 82.

X. CONCLUSION
A SYMPHONY OF TRUTH

Thanks to the works of Hans Urs von Balthasar we today understand better than ever that truth has a "symphonic" nature, i.e., in aspiring to it, one must seek a harmonious union of languages belonging to various traditions and philosophical systems. Both the pain and the disappointment characteristic of postmodernity can serve the discovery of important truths about human nature and about the essence of our interaction with culture. That is not a result of the fact that it was necessary to treat all representatives of constructive postmodernism as discoverers of great truths about man who speak in a language particularly congenial to the generation of the beginning of the third millennium. Such an evaluation would be difficult to apply, for example, to those texts of Catherine Pickstock in which she writes:

> The syntactic usurpation of parataxis and hypotaxis by asyndeton was effected in accordance with the revisers' general principle of transparency, whereby archaic or opaque morphological, syntactic, and lexical forms are replaced, "updated," by the forms of contemporary usage.… The effects of these changes point to a general failure to take account of the intimate link between linguistic form and its content, resulting in a textualization of once verbal and conceptual deeds.[1]

Those same cautions can be made about the discourse of Derrida, when he explains:

> Chora *is* nothing … but not the Nothing which in the anxiety of Dasein would still open the question of being … it says the immemoriality of a desert in the desert of which it is neither a threshold nor a mourning. The question remains open, and with it that of knowing whether this desert can be thought and left to announce itself 'before' the desert that we know … or whether, 'on the contrary', it is 'from' this last desert that we can

1 "Asyndeton: Syntax and Insanity," in PG, 298.

> glimpse that which precedes the first <l'avant-premier>,
> what I call the desert in the desert.[2]

One can understand the reasons which guided Vattimo, when he called a debate inspired by that text of Derrida "the seas of *logoi.*"[3] It is also necessary to admit that Barbara Skarga is right when she criticizes the postmodernist quest for metaphor, which leads to simple linguistic sloppiness. She is entirely justified in concluding that, in reaction to that type of language, not only "does the reader feel completely hopeless," but the philosophers who use it "get lost" as well. In consequence, their linguistic innovations grate with their mannerisms more often than they convince.[4] On the other hand, one must admit that the same charge can be directed at the language of Heidegger and his followers. The lack of clarity and the ambiguity of their statements do not exclude the possibility of elaborating a vision which contains objective values and is susceptible to greater precision in further elaborations.

In the evaluation of the variety of thematic motifs and styles which we meet in various versions of postmodernism, it is necessary to keep one's distance both with respect to attempts to make an uncritical apotheosis of that trend and with respect to those critics who are substantively justified only in relation to populist or deconstructive postmodernism. The presentation of Jürgen Habermas on the occasion of his reception of the Adorno Prize in 1980[5] is a classic example of a text containing such a critique. Shortly thereafter, he withdrew the main charge about conservatism and the new historicism, which he had directed at the critics of modernity, but he left the general impression that he rejected the trend in which ideological generalizations prevailed over argued theses. Leszek Kołakowski evaluated that trend in a similar spirit in the 1980's, writing sarcastically that, besides postmodernism, one can cultivate in philosophy a post-postmodernism, a neo-postmodernism, a neo-antimodernism, etc. One could permanently

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2 Jacques Derrida, "Faith and Knowledge: The Two Sources of 'Religion' at the Limits of Reason Alone," in Jacques Derrida and Gianni Vattimo, eds., *Religion* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), 21.

3 Gianni Vattimo, "Circumstances," in ibid., 6.

4 Barbara Skarga, "Dyskusja: Oczekiwanie bez nadziei," *Znak* 53 (2001): 1: 16 ff.

5 Jürgen Habermas, "Modernity—An Incomplete Project," trans. Seyla Ben-Habib, in Hal Foster, ed., *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Post-Modern Culture* (Seattle: Bay Press, 1983), 3–15.

attach to each of those trends an ideology of liberation, progress, break with outmoded stereotypes of rational thought, etc.[6]

That critique was no doubt justified in reference to those trends within postmodernism in which the critique of the tradition of the Enlightenment was taken as an article of faith and the attempt was made to treat declarations of the death of God as the distinctive cultural feature of our time. We find a much deeper elaboration of that problem in the contemporary works of Kołakowski, where, opposing populist declarations about the post-Christian period, he writes:

> I am convinced, … that religion is a cultural invariant. … It is an invariant, because it corresponds to certain insurmountable inclinations of mind and feeling. … Our entire empirically accessible cosmos is a manifestation of another reality, which is empirically not directly accessible.[7]

Against the background of the rational intellectual tradition, to which the technique of deconstruction is foreign, Kołakowski develops a theme, similar to the ideas of Deleuze, of contemporary nomads who are not able to find spiritual fulfillment in the world revealed by daily experience. Appealing to the formula of the Epistle to the Hebrews (13:14), "here we have no lasting city," the author of *Religion* emphasizes "that our own city is elsewhere, that we do not fully belong to this world, that we have the status of exiles."[8] It is just this intuition that we belong to the unseen, spiritual world which Kołakowski numbers among three "feelings, thoughts, or unsupported intuitions …, which put on the world the seal of religion."[9] One must note that that intuition is very close to the statement of Ward cited above about postmodernity's characteristically incessant search for "visible traces of the invisible" on the path of life's wanderings. That is an intellectual path very close to the wandering from phenomena to foundations suggested by the encyclical *Fides et Ratio.*

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6 Cf., for example, *Ciwilizacja na ławie oskarżonych* (Warsaw: Res Publica, 1990), 201.

7 L. Kołakowski, "Czy już w pochrześcijańskim czasie żijemy?"in Ryszard Rubinkiewicz and Stanisław Zięba, eds., *Sacrum i kultura: chrześcijańskie korzenie przyszlości; Materiały Kongresu kultury chrześcijańskiej, Lublin, 15-17 września 2000* (Lublin: Towarzystwo Naukowe Katolickiego Uniwersytetu Lubelskiego, 2000), 54 ff.

8 Ibid., 55.

9 Ibid.

The superiority of Kołakowski to the trend which appeals to Nietzsche and Deleuze is manifested in the fact that the Polish philosopher tries to avoid unverifiable predictions and aspires to a rational justification for commentaries taking up the theme of the supposed death of God in contemporary culture. Summarizing his presentation to the Congress on Christian Culture in September 2000, he emphasized that

> We may now say, however, that Christianity still exists, despite all the losses that it has suffered. It exists because there without a doubt exist Christians with that same spirit which the martyrs of the past had. As long as they last in our culture, as long as their presence can make others feel ashamed …, as long as they are ready to bear witness to their faith—so long, although the indifferent crowd seems to be irresistible, Christianity exists and it is not true that we live in a post-Christian civilization.[10]

Kołakowski sees the further fate of Christianity as dependent on the testimony of martyrs and the faith of priests as well as on how well those martyrs and priests are able to pass that faith on.[11] That view seems significantly more justified than the visionary predictions developed by the representatives of deconstructive postmodernism.

Among English-speaking critics of modernity one finds authors whose work is difficult to recognize as of value either for Christian thought or for contemporary philosophy of God. Among them are Mark C. Taylor, Don Cupitt, Charles Winquist, and Carl Raschke. The post-structuralist conception of language and of desire played a significant role in their intellectual development. Especially the works of Don Cupitt, which served as a substitute for liberal faith after the death of God, have evoked deep opposition since secular humanism does not have much in common either with the truth of the Gospels or with the Christian interpretation of culture.[12] The important features of his intellectual perspective are rather the experience of Kundera's lightness of being and the rhetoric of the surface, programmatically avoiding metaphysical and theological reflection.[13]

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10 Ibid., 58.

11 Ibid.

12 See, for example, Don Cupitt, *After God: The Future of Religion* (New York: Basic Books, 1997).

13 Cf. Graham Ward, "The Modern Theologians," in David Ford, ed., *Postmodern Theology* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), 590.

Thomas Altizer and David Ray Griffin represent a different approach among American postmodernists. The former deduces his radical version of so-called Christian atheism from the tradition of Hegel and Nietzsche; the latter appeals to a Whiteheadian process philosophy and quantum mechanics. I have criticized the extreme versions of a humanistic substitute for Christianity proposed by Altizer in other works.[14] A different critique must be directed at the ideas of Griffin. Defending the presuppositions of that programmatically anti-metaphysical trend, he speaks as a champion of a Whiteheadian process philosophy. The problem is that, from the time of the publication of *Process and Reality*, its conceptual categories have had as many critics as they have had enthusiasts. There is, however, no reason to connect process metaphysics with the postmodernist tradition since its principles were formulated long before the development of the critique of modernity. Griffin himself admits that he uses the term "postmodern" in a sense different from the one accepted in the Francophone tradition. He has, without a doubt, a right to that difference in usage. His particular ideas concerning necessary changes in the language of philosophy remain substantively justified and are congenial to the tradition of postmodernism. It is difficult, however, to accept that that last tradition can be adequately expressed with the help of a conceptual apparatus worked out by Whitehead at the beginning of the twentieth century.

Those warnings show that it is necessary to make substantive evaluations of the particular works of representatives of postmodernism, and not of the declarations of those same postmodernists about the particular trend to which they belong. It is not possible to express Christian theism in those trends of postmodernism in which relativism is absolutized, the death of metaphysics is maintained, and the possibility of suprasystemic dialogue is put into question. There is, however, the possibility of a creative development of theism in those trends which practice a "privatized philosophy,"[15] i.e., one unconnected with the classical tradition of a comprehensive metaphysical system, but undertaking particular questions brought by contemporary cultural evolution. When we refer to the philosophical ideas of Pascal, Kierkegaard, Marcel, and Strawson, we do not seek in their work a comprehensive metaphysical system, nor do we ask about a received theory of being. The particular problems raised by the authors just mentioned turn out, however, to be so interesting that we make use of them in order to take into consideration that which is creative and

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14 Józef Życiński, *Teizm i filozofia analityczna* (Cracow: Znak, 1988), 2: 245–247.

15 Cf. the remarks of Stefan Morawski, *O filozofowaniu (rozmowiają Andrzej Szahaj, Anna Zeidler-Janiszewska*) (Toruń: A. Marszałek, 1995), 12.

valuable in concrete cases. Both small narratives and weak thought can introduce important contributions into philosophical discourse about the Infinite God. It is characteristic that, among those who have for so long consistently declared the death of God, we now find so many signs of interest in theological problems.[16] Both the interests just mentioned and proximity to the Christian tradition are particularly evident in the work of the Italian representative of "weak thought," Gianni Vattimo.[17] Supporters of the style of Lacan and Derrida can be surprised by the assertions of the Italian thinker to the effect that it is "the fact of the Incarnation that confers on history the sense of a redemptive revelation" and nihilism should be understood only "as an indefinite process of reduction, diminution, weakening."[18] An important divergence of opinions, however, appears in questions of ethics—Vattimo decidedly rejects the Catholic evaluation of homosexuality. The drama of earlier life-choices ultimately prevails over a theoretical analysis of the situation, revealing the complexity of existential entanglements deprived of intellectual roots in the great metaphysical tradition.

As a particularly important phenomenon, expressing the intellectual transformation of the past few years, one must note the growth of interest in the topic of faith among the authors close to the tradition of constructive postmodernism. Among the specially valuable works raising the classical questions of theism in a new language, one can list the ideas found in works concerning the liturgy of meeting (Catherine Pickstock[19]), the anthropology of the Cross (Jean Yves Lacoste[20]), the place of Revelation (Jean-Luc Marion[21]), and nomadic

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16 Cf. the question of Barbara Skarga: "Why do people who by conviction are practically unbelievers and in the past undertook a severe critique of any kind of religion suddenly after many years turn to that theme? Why has the problem of religion unexpectedly become important for them?" *Znak* 53 (2001): 1: 21.

17 See, for example, Gianni Vattimo, *The End of Modernity: Nihilism and Hermeneutics in Postmodern Culture* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988).

18 Vattimo, "The Trace of the Trace," 116.

19 *After Writing: On the Liturgical Consummation of Philosophy* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997); see also *Radical Orthodoxy: A New Theology* (Oxford: Routledge, 1999).

20 "Liturgy and Kenosis," in PG, 249–264.

21 "In the Name: How to Avoid Speaking of Negative Theology?" in John D. Caputo and Michael J. Scanlon, eds., *God, the Gift, and Postmodernism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), 20–41; *God without Being: Hors-texte* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991); *Questions cartésiennes II: Sur l'ego et sur Dieu* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1996).

ecstasy as a New Jerusalem (Gillian Rose[22]). A detailed discussion of those publications would require extensive treatment going beyond the scope of this work. Discussions of those publications are available in anthologies containing varied samples of postmodernistic theism,[23] valuable discussions of the virtues and deficiencies of postmodernism,[24] and extensive monographs revealing the foundations of the spirituality of the time of postmodernity.[25]

One must note that the God of the constructive postmodernists is by no means a kind of "dead God," about whom so much has been written by those under the intellectual influence of Nietzsche. The occupation of philosophy is not that of an academic funeral society which limits its activities to the announcement of successive deaths. After a short time of fascination with death notices on the part of the representatives of postmodernism, there appeared a critical distance towards those ideas in which catastrophic nihilism was considered to be the coronation of thought liberated both from the influences of Christianity and from those of the tradition of the Enlightenment. The philosophy of God proposed in constructive postmodernism is no less interesting than the philosophy of God elaborated by existentialism and phenomenology, and sometimes it is even difficult to distinguish from the legacy of those two traditions. It deserves particular attention when it is taken into consideration that at the foundations of postmodernism is found a rejection of principles of fundamental importance to Christianity.

We have gone through a cultural period in which the disenchantment of the world came along with disappointment in the world. Its symbol is a generation "possessed by Dionysus."[26] A conviction about the destruction of religion, the devaluation of value, and the desacralization of the body found expression in its illusions. Its reaction was an escape into nihilism as an attempt at rebellion against the axiological and metaphysical establishment. Man, liberated from the

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22 "New Jerusalem, Old Athens," in PG, 318–340.

23 E.g., TeP; PG.

24 E.g., Krystyna Wilkoszewska, *Wariacje na postmodernizm* (Cracow: Universitas, 2000).

25 Giuseppe Savagnone, *Il banchetto e la danza: la vita spirituale nella società postmoderna* (Milano: Paoline, 1999) and *Evangelizzazione nella post-modernità: istruzioni brevi per una navigazione a vista* (Leumann (Torino): Elle Di Ci, 1996).

26 This term combines the titles of two works of Jean Brun, *Le retour de Dionysos* (Paris: Desclée, 1969) and Jacques Ellul, *Les nouveaux possédés* (Paris: Fayard, 1973).

infantile illusions of early postmodernity at the start of the third millennium:

> just as did the caveman, discovers in his religious experience, the *sacrum*, laying foundations for his existence, transcending his finitude, and assuring his earthly odyssey an eternal anchorage and an eternal future. … The crisis of contemporary culture is rooted in amnesia and expresses itself in aphasia. The Christian response give it a new hope, revealing to it that the tragic aspect of existence is not exhausted in a stifling horizon of immanence but shines with the light of the Word.[27]

The common task for all those who, at the threshold of the third millennium, want to work together to defend the threatened culture is the search for great values giving meaning to the intellectual aspirations of the human race. In reflection on the status and the role of those values we have recently gone through the childhood illness of postmodernism, in which deconstruction of the past and sometimes even deconstruction as such was treated as a futuristic panacea. Freed from such illusions, we can now seek new intellectual projects in which concern for the future is combined with appreciation of tradition, and the painful cry of Nietzsche supplements the rational arguments of St. Thomas Aquinas. On that view, the intellectual quest for a new face of the God of the postmodernists can turn out to be a component of a great project about which the Psalmist wrote as he constantly sought the face of God (Psalms 27: 8).

27 Paul Poupard, "Pomiędzy barbarzyństwem i nadzieją" in *Sacrum i kultura*, 31.

INDEX

THE COUNCIL FOR RESEARCH IN VALUES AND PHILOSOPHY

PURPOSE

Today there is urgent need to attend to the nature and dignity of the person, to the quality of human life, to the purpose and goal of the physical transformation of our environment, and to the relation of all this to the development of social and political life. This, in turn, requires philosophic clarification of the base upon which freedom is exercised, that is, of the values which provide stability and guidance to one's decisions.

Such studies must be able to reach deeply into one's culture and that of other parts of the world as mutually reinforcing and enriching in order to uncover the roots of the dignity of persons and of their societies. They must be able to identify the conceptual forms in terms of which modern industrial and technological developments are structured and how these impact upon human self-understanding. Above all, they must be able to bring these elements together in the creative understanding essential for setting our goals and determining our modes of interaction. In the present complex global circumstances this is a condition for growing together with trust and justice, honest dedication and mutual concern.

The Council for Studies in Values and Philosophy (RVP) unites scholars who share these concerns and are interested in the application thereto of existing capabilities in the field of philosophy and other disciplines. Its work is to identify areas in which study is needed, the intellectual resources which can be brought to bear thereupon, and the means for publication and interchange of the work from the various regions of the world. In bringing these together its goal is scientific discovery and publication which contributes to the present promotion of humankind.

In sum, our times present both the need and the opportunity for deeper and ever more progressive understanding of the person and of the foundations of social life. The development of such understanding is the goal of the RVP.

PROJECTS

A set of related research efforts is currently in process:

1. *Cultural Heritage and Contemporary Change: Philosophical Foundations for Social Life.* Focused, mutually coordinated research teams in university centers prepare volumes as part of an integrated philosophic search for self-understanding differentiated by culture and civilization. These evolve more adequate understandings of the person in society and look to the cultural heritage of each for the resources to respond to the challenges of its own specific contemporary transformation.

2. *Seminars on Culture and Contemporary Issues*. This series of 10 week crosscultural and interdisciplinary seminars is coordinated by the RVP in Washington.

3. *Joint-Colloquia* with Institutes of Philosophy of the National Academies of Science, university philosophy departments, and societies. Underway since 1976 in Eastern Europe and, since 1987, in China, these concern the person in contemporary society.

4. *Foundations of Moral Education and Character Development.* A study in values and education which unites philosophers, psychologists, social scientists and scholars in education in the elaboration of ways of enriching the moral content of education and character development. This work has been underway since 1980.

The personnel for these projects consists of established scholars willing to contribute their time and research as part of their professional commitment to life in contemporary society. For resources to implement this work the Council, as 501 C3 a non-profit organization incorporated in the District of Colombia, looks to various private foundations, public programs and enterprises.

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