

INTELLECTUALS IN POSTMODERNITY?

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My intention here is to speak of the philosopher, his freedom and his responsibility, of freedom and responsibility of philosophy in postmodernity. Why does the philosopher have to show something no other humanists are supposed to show, why does he have to (at least try to) answer the greatest, most essential questions the humankind can pose? Is that role the past or the present of philosophy, in the world and in Poland? I am going to speak here of the French and the American, but always having this part of Europe in mind, I am referring to Western discussions always remembering about my country. And the question of intellectuals in postmodernity is one of the most intriguing today, especially considering its self-referentiality, intellectuals asking questions about themselves...

Let us refer here to several points of interest, several catchwords that evoke the whole complicated heart of the matter: Martin Heidegger in 1933 and later, Paul de Man in the years of 1940-42 and later (that "later" being no less important for the current discussions), Robert Faurisson and the whole group of historians-"revisionists" of the Holocaust in France and in the USA in two recent decades. I would say the following: the material for the discussions that are of interest to me today are the most traumatic events of the twentieth century and the behaviour of the philosopher, or in broader terms, the intellectual, associated with them. We can add to them Sartre's conception of the "committed literature", Georges Bataille's fascinations with the war, Maurice Blanchot's fascist texts from the pre-war "Combat" journal, "maoist" involvements of the French intellectuals in the hot sixties, Michel Foucault's enthusiasm with respect to the Iranian "spiritual revolution", Noam Chomsky's (as well as Jean Beaufret's) basically positive attitude to the "revisionists" who negate gassing in Auschwitz etc etc. If we add that all, we can see a certain complex of questions and issues the penetration of which may be one of today's "tasks of thinking". (Leaving philosophers' domain aside for a while, one can easily add to that constellation of questions, attitudes and behaviour e. g. Ezra Pound with his peculiar economy, Gottfried Benn, Knut Hamsun or Louis-Ferdinand Céline from "Bagatelles pour un massacre", not to mention our Polish fascinations, involvements, and commitments after the second world war.)

My idea is that it is perhaps worthwhile to treat the recent philosophical "affairs" or "cases" somehow collectively. Not much perhaps can be revealed by just one of them, but the discussions in question are in fact similar to one another, at least when looked at from the perspective of the question of freedom and responsibility of the philosopher (the intellectual) today. I hope that questions asked about that not so distant past, about those fascinations and those seductions will help us to think about ourselves, our present history, perhaps even - our future. Therefore I would like to skip in my considerations Heidegger himself or de Man himself, leaving them to Heideggerians and deconstructionists. What I see as important is what the history of the two can say us of our history, about ourselves here and now. For, I suppose, the thinking of past choices, attitudes, past silence, writing, acting is the thinking of the constitutive elements of our not so distant past rather than of some "aberrations", "mistakes", human "failings" or "weaknesses". If we left aside the general question: what to do with those biographical-philosophical discoveries?, we would place ourselves somehow somewhere else, next to Heidegger's or de Man's past, and in our calm, European, Mediterranean and civilized past. And what we mean here is the thought that deliberately served ideology, that hide behind it, profiting from it. That gap is very important - we mean using ideology in promoting one's own thought in a naive belief that one (as an intellectual, as a philosopher) can be the "guide of leaders". That is precisely the affiliation to a greater power, so criticized by Rorty. The thinker is a tyrant, Alexandre Kojève says, philosophy needs tyranny to actualize its truths, to make the end of history come (and no participant in pre-war meetings of *College de Sociologie* was unaware that Kojève's Napoleon and Hegel - was Stalin and Kojève himself). Kojève is dogmatic, but also his adversary and friend Leo Strauss is dogmatic (as can be seen from a recently published correspondence between them) in his insistence that a "man of wisdom" is higher in a hierarchy of beings than a "man of action" whose aim is to "advise the tyrant" and thereby "shape the history". In these controversies about affiliations of philosophy, thought, to politics, that is, to power, there remains a hope that not everyone will have - like Plato - his or her Syracuse, his or her Dionysios.

Let us remind now briefly a couple of penetrating questions and statements that could be heard recently in the context that interests us here. Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, "Heidegger, Art, and Politics": "Heidegger's commitment in 1933 was neither a mistake nor a fault" and it is "totally coherent with his

thought" – it is not a product of a mistake that just happened to a thought but it reveals what constantly threatens that thought, reveals its danger. Emmanuel Levinas in "Comme un consentement l'horrible" asks: "But does not his silence on the subject of gas chambers and death camps in the times of peace testify to the depths of a soul totally inaccessible to compassion and to as if consent to a horror?" Hans-Georg Gadamer, "A Return from Syracuse", says:

"In 33 and 34 Heidegger thought that he followed his dream and fulfilled his deepest philosophical mission when he attempted to revolutionize the university from the bottom".

Jean-Francois Lyotard, "Heidegger and 'the Jews'": "In his dossier, the most serious accusation was written on blank pages: it was his stubborn silence about the Holocaust" and the conclusion: "The negative lesson that 'forgetting' of Shoah on the part of a great thinker of Being gives us, teaches us that the forgotten is first of all not Being but the duty of justice".

In the school of deconstructionists – to change the terrain for a moment and pass to the aftermath of de Man's "affair" – there appear such essential questions as "is the work I am doing complicit with something that associating me with would appal me?" (Deborah Esch asks). We want to know who we are sleeping with, we need "safe criticism"... There begins a harsh press attack on deconstruction and, more broadly, on postmodernism. Whoever was not able to beat Derrida was now able to beat de Man the "fascist" (at least in his youth, but who knows...) From the "Responses. On Paul de Man Wartime Journalism" volume there emerges a picture of polemics about de Man as a field of a final struggle with deconstruction as such: it is, namely, the greatest threat to the American nation, its common public number one enemy. As Derrida explains in his "Biodegradables", the real stakes in all these seeming court proceedings "was not only, and not first of all, de Man of the 1940-42, but the deconstruction of 1989". And I suggest that it is worthwhile to have another look at that hot debate and see it as a manifestation of current discussions not about a concrete biographical and philosophical issue, youthful years of a significant literary critic in hard times, but as a discussion about the place in society, tasks and obligations of the intellectual in postmodernity.

Let us give it a thought – what may underline such focusing of attention and intellectual energy on seemingly easy questions pertaining to life on the one, and work on the other hand of several figures of the XXth century philosophy and

literary theory, or on absurd and seemingly easily refutable enunciations of several historians (revisionists) of the Holocaust. So once again: Heidegger, de Man, Faurisson (bearing in mind the triviality and grotesqueness of the latter figure). What did Heidegger say and what did he keep silence about when others were silent or were leaving Germany, and when others were speaking after their return to Germany following the war? Why did he keep silence about the Holocaust until his death, even in his famous testamentary "Der Spiegel" interview, even in his conversation with Paul Celan who waited for it so much; was not his silence "unbearable" and "unexcusable" as Lyotard in "Heidegger and 'the jews'" and Lacoue-Labarthe in "Heidegger, Art, and Politics" want? Was Paul de Man a (hidden) anti-semitic during his whole life or just during his Belgium "collaborationist" years and what may have stood behind his "aestheticism" or even "quietism"? Is there really anything morally disturbing that binds Nietzsche, Heidegger, de Man and Derrida? And finally Robert Faurisson explicitly negating gassing in Auschwitz: what did he betray that he managed to incite such an intellectual storm in France of the early eighties, that the wound was so deep that required years-long polemic simultaneously from various sides (e. g. of Lyotard in "The Differend"). How is one "to live with Faurisson" (regarding that case broader), how to "discuss" with him without according him the status of an equal disputant? These were some recent ethical questions in France to cope with. How weak today must be the place of the intellectual in French culture that such a Faurisson is able to engage so many philosophers? As Pierre Vidal-Naquet asks in his "Assassins of Memory" essays – how to avoid nobilitating revisionists by engaging in serious debate, how to write knowing that the discussion with them is "absolutely impossible", how to fight with lies and bad will, and fight or not? Questions put on the margins of these "affairs" are appearing all over the world: what is "freedom of the intellectual", "freedom of the philosopher", and what is their "ethics". When the unshaken life of former leaders of human souls is disturbed, they start to engage in self-analysis, start to take care of themselves or of their predecessors, looking for their own self-definitions. When their self-image trembles, what also trembles is their place in culture, lifelong vocation, the meaning of their work and of their questioning of the reality.

The point I want to make here is that it is not accidentally that these exemplarily mentioned discussions are important today – some two or three decades nobody except specialists would really care about them, nobody would pay

much attention. The "facts" about Heidegger were quite well known but it was only in the late eighties in France that the inspiring discussions took place – when questions that intellectuals asked (among them – philosophers, an important distinction to be carefully drawn) began to be also about themselves. The questions are born out of concern for their image in culture, for their "mission" in it (as modernity used to see it). Heidegger's "affair" engaged to various degrees some from among the greatest French and German minds of the end of the century, just as de Man's "affair" raised highest emotions in America – and questions asked were philosophical ones concerning the philosopher's "life" and "work", "work" referred to "life". They were about a betrayal of a certain modern ethos that was formed in the times of Dreyfus' affair in France (Zola: *j'accuse!*), of a certain morally obliging way of life of the philosopher in culture. Now, together with the questioning of the cultural project of the Enlightenment and putting into question of great narratives, at the same time the product of that project, the child of Enlightenment and the producer of that metanarrative, e. g. the intellectual, finds himself in a new situation in which he has to find his new place in a changing culture.

Thus, the question is of the intellectual, freedom - and responsibility that stops that freedom at some point (and may lead to significant discussions from Zola to Benda to Sartre, and then recently in America to Noam Chomsky, Paul Bové and Edward Said). I mean freedom that would not be a "retreat to the Academy" and "political irrelevance" (Bauman), that would rather be "recognition of contingency" (Rorty), or "freedom without the Idea of Emancipation" (Lyotard). Freedom that would be the horizon for questions of a philosopher and philosophy. What is important is also the responsibility for philosophizing vs. the French phenomenon of "thought police" (Lyotard/Rogozinski), responsibility for new readings as well as for producing utopias and social visions of a new world. Does the answer lie in "privatized philosophy" (Rorty on Derrida), expertise in the canon of books of a given discipline (Bauman, Rorty), or perhaps in the "aesthetics of existence" and "life as a work of art" (the late Foucault)? Traditional questions of "aestheticism", "elitism" and "moralism" – seen from a different, postmodern perspective of the public and the private, "self-creation" and "solidarity" (Rorty) appear here.

Now I would like to show two extreme attitudes towards philosophy in post-war years, still available to us as the horizon of our choices: a Hegelian and the

Nietzschean one. I mean here the Hegel of Alexandre Kojève and the Nietzsche as read by Derrida and Deleuze. Kojève (in his "Hegel, Marx, and Christianity") said the following: "the future of the world, and thereby the meaning of the present and the meaning of the past will depend, in a final analysis, on the contemporary interpretations of Hegel's works", to put it briefly – the future of the world will depend on whether we will be reading Hegel. It is important, I suppose, to remember the permanence of that belief in the value of philosophy (common, incidentally, also to Husserl from his last Prague and Vienna lectures, and Heidegger after his "turn" to whom a paraphrased saying can be attributed: the future of the (German) world – but also of Europe – will depend on whether we will be reading Hölderlin). Hegelian questions, as we know, had dominated (almost) whole post-war French thought – as Michel Foucault said in his opening College de France lecture in 1970: "all our epoch attempts to flee Hegel", as Hegel from "The Phenomenology of Spirit" in Kojève's anthropological reading had dominated French philosophical imagination for over a quarter of a century. The abrupt contrast to – and antidote against – the hegemony of Hegel was Nietzsche. The passage from Hegel to Nietzsche happened in the French culture in the sixties, and since then it has rarely come to philosophical mind that the (Kojévian) "future of the world" may depend on a "reading of Nietzsche", or on a reading of any other philosopher. The philosopher who puts it most explicitly is Richard Rorty, bringing to himself a storm of criticism from all sides, both from political and philosophical right and left. It is also Zygmunt Bauman whose "powerlessness of the intellectual", "retreat to the Academy", subsidized and out of touch with the reality, whose ideas of "interpretive" rather than "legislative" reason – translated into philosophical vocabulary – can just mean the end of traditional attitudes of not only the philosopher, but the intellectual as well. His "Legislators and Interpreters", "Intimations of Postmodernity" and especially his recent "Life in Fragments. Essays in Postmodern Morality" testify in a totally different vocabulary to what Lyotard diagnosed in his "Postmodern Condition" as the phenomenon of "incredulity towards metanarratives". The incredulity common and justified that brings about the crisis of the status of the producer of these metanarratives, i.e. of the intellectual (as he puts it brutally in "The Tomb of the Intellectual").

Another point is the following: one might consider whether the pair of Hegel/Nietzsche read in that way (the former of the Marxist and Heideggerian

Kojeve and the latter of Deleuze and Derrida) is not parallel to the pair of modern and postmodern intellectuals. Asking what the intellectual was supposed to do according to readings of Hegel and Nietzsche, and how the French thought made a radical change from Hegel to Nietzsche in the sixties (and then again, with a new generation of philosophers, as some argue, once again away from Nietzsche in the nineties) – we are asking about a (new) figure of the intellectual today, as the change of its status may also result from that turn. Nietzsche may be a key point in today's discussions of the role and tasks of the philosopher, starting with Derrida and Deleuze, "Anti-Oedipus" of the latter and Guattari, Lyotard from "Libidinal Economy" or – in the USA – Allan Bloom on the one hand (with his "Nietzscheanized America") and Richard Rorty on the other (with his Nietzsche contrasted with Heidegger – the one whose fault was "taking philosophy – too – seriously", as the title of his review of Farias's book says). "The New Nietzsche" in that context turns out to be a significant point of reference in discussions of the intellectual today (especially considering the opposition of a new generation of French philosophers defining themselves against him as well as against post-structuralists on the basis of different tasks of the philosopher).

Thus, to sum up, one could think of two poles in thinking about the role of philosophy in culture and politics: on the one of them there would be Hegel (and Kojève, as well as the "serious" Heidegger getting others read Hölderlin) who make the history of the world dependent on philosophy, and on the other there would be Nietzsche as a model of self-creation who does not care about public matters too much.

Finally, let us have a look at a traditional and well-rooted model in sociological and philosophical thinking of culture; Zygmunt Bauman says the following about it: "All wills are free, but some are freer than others: some people who more or less skillfully perform the function of educators, inculcate (or modify) cognitive predispositions, moral values and aesthetic preferences of others". And here we are in the middle of the controversy about intellectuals that is of interest to us – starting from the Platonic notion of *basileia* (leading to philosophers-kings), from the Seventh Letter, through Kant's "Was ist Aufklärung?" and its Foucauldian interpretations, Hegel and his "madness" while he believed to be the incarnation of the Absolute Spirit, to Heidegger's *Führung* and his belief in a "philosophical mission". There is a constant theme in the

philosophical tradition – there is a group of people who know more than others as they have an access to truth, who discover truth with power of their intellects and – if need be – may present it to the world in a softer, comprehensible way. The philosopher-prophet used to tell others "what to do" (as Foucault's "universal intellectual"), used to be an unquestioned authority because he knew the deepest – philosophical context (the metaphoric of tearing away surface layers to get to the hidden essence is not accidental). He used to be the authority looking at anything "from a philosophical point of view" i.e. that of the world, humankind, the universal rather than the particular, the eternal rather than the transient etc etc. The conversation with him used to require rising to the philosophical level on the part of his interlocutor. As Richard Rorty put it in his "Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature" – the philosopher used to express his opinion in all matters, his voice being the most important one in ongoing discussions.

I think it is possible to catch a glimpse of the account of the contrast between modernity and postmodernity through the figure of the main hero of modernity i. e. of the intellectual, produced for its needs and who, with questioning of it, may recede towards a less prominent role in culture. The traditional intellectual recedes as part of the world that disappears together with modernity – that is the question discussed for twenty years in philosophy and sociology. The traditional intellectual with a superior status in culture in the past (as shown by e. g. Richard Rorty) in postmodern philosophers's view has to start looking for another place in it; thus there return such questions as: do intellectuals as products of modernity paradigmatically from Zola to Sartre have any significant future in postmodernity? Are they as species doomed to be extinct? Is the very category of "postmodern intellectual" contradiction in terms? What are tasks of the said postmodern intellectual?, what are his obligations, if any – and to whom? Is he to be a social critic and what is his moral and political responsibility today? Is philosophy as a discipline well prepared to such post-modern challenges? Does it react to what is going on in culture today?

Still another question, to close my remarks, is the role of intellectuals in Central Europe in the times of transformation and the usefulness of Western discussions referred to here for the consciousness of intellectuals in our part of the world. The question could be put in the following way: what can we, inhabitants of postcommunist Central Europe expect from the so-called postmod-

ern thought? Is postmodern thought an intellectual challenge to us, is it worth being thought over by us, with respect to our questions and our problems? The very question about the intellectual in that part of the world is extremely important, I suppose. His place, role and status is – to some degree – only in the process of formation now in a new and somehow unexpected situation, therefore I strongly believe that questions asked in postmodern thought with respect to the intellectual may turn out to be interesting. I have personally come to the conclusion that it is worthwhile to try to make use of experiences of postmodern philosophy, bearing in mind that it is a radical thinking which appeared in a different cultural (and economic) situation. The thought of Rorty, Derrida, Lyotard or Foucault may be useful, responding to a different degree to our double – Central European and postmodern – experience. Not all its questions are equally burning, but also not all are sufficiently exposed there from our perspective. So I believe potentially there are many essential connections and parallels, points of convergence and questions equally important in the West and in Poland. Nevertheless, the urgency of thinking through certain questions is greater here than in the West because what is at stake here is the very fragile future, still indeterminate and still not fully clear. While the West goes on to a large extent no matter what philosophers and theoreticians think, here thinking can – although not necessarily has to – undergo potentially bigger transformations owing to philosophy and theory. Thus the responsibility of the intellectual seems to be much more serious than e. g. in the USA, hence the need of thinking about his ethics, hence the need of thinking about some essential questions from a different perspective – perhaps the one in which the place of the intellectual is not as determinate, and as degraded, as in the West.

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