

THE SCHOOLS OF PERIPHERY

MIDWAY ALONG THE ROAD: THE WARSAW SCHOOL OF HISTORIANS OF IDEAS¹

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The Warsaw School has been spoken of many times already. Maria Janion mentioned it at one time, a certain Latin American student of Bronisław Baczko wrote about it, others wrote about it in the Western press immediately after 1968, when the School was broken up by administrative methods. One talks and writes about a school which was never officially formed. It was a group of people connected by similar biographies, common seminars, discussions, similar readings, often by interests and generational experiences.

Without exaggeration, one can say that from the end of the 1950s, Warsaw's intellectual life, and with time the lives of other academic circles, became dominated by these historians of ideas. Other groups, either closed themselves in isolation or were pushed to the margins of intellectual life, and never received a considerable response. Neither the Thomists from Lublin, nor the [Roman] Ingarden group from Kraków, nor the Elzenberg group from Toruń achieved such popularity and standing. Historians of ideas spoke both in a philosophical language and the language of the essay, they occupied themselves with contemporary journalism. They created a modern Polish equivalent to the 18th-century camp of French philosophers. With this same intuition for social issues, they attracted the widest possible audience connecting philosophical issues with the most *actuelle*, current needs of the moment. They were published in *Po Prostu (Simply)*, *Nowa Kultura (New Culture)*, *Argumenty (Arguments)*, as well as in *Twórczość (Creativity)*, *Nowe Drogi (New Paths)*, *Studia Filozoficzne (Philosophical Studies)*, *Studia Socjologiczne (Sociological Studies)*. They wrote fairy tales, editorials, and tried their hand at poetry and translation. They were present in more serious discussions in journals, they were talked about and their work was reviewed.

This whole time I am speaking of 'them' and 'their', though I am not sure if particular representatives of the school would agree with such a common characterization, that they should all fit into one bag. They never spoke of themselves as 'we', differentiating themselves from some 'others' (unless this 'we' included the progressive intelligentsia or philosophers).

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It was a school in a different sense of the word than the Frankfurt School or symbolic interactionism, functionalism, structuralism or phenomenology. There was no master from whom the students, though differing among themselves, derived their beginnings. They did not have their own George Herbert Mead or Edmund Husserl. They did not publish their own journal, and did not possess their own institution (as it was with the Frankfurt School).

They were connected by a community of assumptions, a method which I ascribe to them, and which, so it seems, one can uncover in analyzing the work they had published between 'October 1956' and 'March 1968':

The majority of them were born in the 1920s and 30s, and studied in Poland after liberation at universities in Łódź and Warsaw. They developed their intellectual culture thanks to professors of the Lwów-Warsaw School, and thus from Tadeusz and Janina Kotarbiński, Kazimierz Ajdukiewicz, Stanisław and Maria Ossowski. With time, they attended meetings led by Tadeusz Kroński and Nina Assorodobraj-Kula.

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For the most part, they chose Marxism. They were members of the PZPR party and they started their writing careers with critiques of the teacher. Baczko argued with Tadeusz Kotarbiński, and Kołakowski with Kazimierz Ajdukiewicz. Jerzy Szacki, in the spirit of the times, wrote about pragmatism. Later came 'October' and the crisis of orthodoxy, an enormous wave of critique of the – so called – schematically closed Marxism, commencing already in 1954-55. And finally, they made an attempt to build their own interpretation of an open, humanitarian, and activist Marxist philosophy; and along with this came a fascination with Gramsci, Lukacs, and Goldmann. Along the way, they did much to make available hitherto invalidated and absent Western thought. They reached out for, above all, existentialism and socialist thought broadly understood. With time they abandoned the language of Marxist and drifted away from that intellectual tradition. The year 1968 made, so it seems, the disintegration of the school inevitable, but it has endured and still endures through its works, upon which the generations of 'March 1968' and 'December 1970' were raised. *Ethics without a Code* or *Priest and Jester* stand as exemplars of ethical thought, answering well the needs of the moment and situation. After a while other groups appeared, or maybe they are still appearing (e.g., the phenomenological movement created by Józef Tischner and Krzysztof Michalski), through which new examples of practicing social and political thought are born. But the works of Jerzy Szacki, Leszek Kołakowski, Bronisław Baczko, Andrzej Walicki² and others are still read and received with interest and also awaited with the same earlier curiosity.

² Walicki, although he was close to the 'school' in the 1960s in terms of methodology, he fundamentally differed politically: he was never a Stalinist, nor even a member of the communist party.

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The most interesting and serious critics of Stalinism in Polish thought (though not the only ones, see the excellent essays by Ossowski written even before 1950) came from among its ardent supporters. Their critique, so lasting and important for us (today, for instance, their excellent sense exposes the totalitarian dangers present in Western leftist thought) was limited in principle to the intellectual. This critique was an unmasking of myths and schemas of thought leading to an ossification of Stalinism and susceptibility for total politics, while in a lesser sense it was a critique of the system which favored this thought and of which this philosophy was an expression. Questions as to the socio-psychology of totalitarianism (in this was expressed the school's 'abstraction of thought') were absent. They did not pose questions – in any case their traces are not textually present – about why those educated by the best professors turned out to be susceptible to the myths of Stalinism, or about why the humanist tradition turned out to be such a weak barrier in the face of political bestiality, nor did they ask which factors influenced the liberation from the myth of the 'besieged fortress.' Their critique of Stalinism was, above all, a critique of the mind practicing Stalinist philosophy, a reflection on how the acceptance of certain assumptions leads to a moral and intellectual negation of oneself and one's own values. This critique had a purely intellectual character and explanations concerning 'access to' and 'exit from' Stalinism were also limited to the pure act of self-awareness. The goal of their discourse was to remove the blinkers from the mind, the blinkers which lead to the mind's ethical annihilation against the will of the knowing subject, to the priesthood, to the failure of discerning the multiplicity and wealth of the world, to double thinking. Following the example of Enlightenment philosophy, they fought with illusions and superstitions in the name of an enlightened, skeptical, doubting and brave mind that was devoid of fanaticism.

In other words: none of them wrote a generational biography of a group whose fate has been so important for our period, whose creativity was so meaningful. My charge should not be understood in the moral sense. I do not intend to criticize or condemn anyone. That would be, as if I was, taking advantage of the privilege of time and subsequent experiences. I only mean to say that we must understand ourselves, our biographies, because this is what has created the history of the last decades.

The School existed through Marxism, as a reaction to Stalinism and as a consequential attempt to defeat it, not as a mechanical rejection of it. Marxism was for them a philosophy which moved their thinking. Without reviewing the foundations of Stalinist philosophy, it is difficult to understand the worldview of the school. I will thus begin my own analysis with a presentation of what Stalinism was in Poland; Stalinism, as the representatives of the school saw it.

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Stalinism replaced philosophy with a vulgarization of sociological knowledge. The effort to understand and describe thought, to critically analyze and interpret texts and concepts, was replaced with the ascription of class relations to specific thinkers. Locating the dependence between thought (meaning: superstructure) and the 'existential ground' of knowledge (Robert Merton's term) became recognized as the only key to understanding the history of culture. Only those conceptions and those thinkers were understood who had some class interests, purposes, goals and intentions.

The dependence between thought and its class roots had a deliberate character due to this. Ideologues or philosophers create specific classes as a tool in the class struggle with fraudulent intent. A distorted image of the world in people's minds was derived *de facto* not as much from history, or from social practice and the mechanisms that rule it, as from the attributes of the mind. The unmasking of philosophy, tearing away the curtains, judgement of philosophy's actual roots and true content were accomplished through the indication of the class origin of thought and intention which the capitalist class used in producing conventionalism, fascism, structuralism, and liberalism. Although class interest was so capacious that it could be expressed by very different ideologies, often standing in conflict with one another. The enemy of stupidity was able to use all kinds of weapons, even the strangest ones, in order to fool or deceive its opponent.

The concept of class and class interest was subject to reification. These were the two immutable entities which had survived in an identical character for a century. A class was not a group that could be grasped empirically. Therefore, it was not clear how specific people participate in group consciousness, how they acquire it, and how they reshape it. Thus, depending on the situation, the goals and context, it was possible to assign any ideas to a class. The field was open to intellectual discretion. No one attempted to answer the question in what sense a given philosophy was the ideological reflection of a given class.

In Stalinist philosophy, the class functioned in a simplified and sterilized history. It turned out that there was no other thought than class thought, no other organizations or institutions other than class ones. The whole past was eradicated of other values than those currently preached, of other types of activity, of positions than those which marked class grounds. Ever present in history was a dialog between two positions: reaction and progress, of two voices: of an ascending and declining class. No other voice could be extracted from the past. No one could show modern man a different way of thinking, some other alternatives. 'No one will threaten with pangs of conscience and remind him of human responsibilities' wrote Tadeusz Kroński.

Stalinist ideologues claimed that class divisions within modern society had a polarizing character. The thesis about the exacerbation of class conflict (the myth of

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the 'besieged fortress') was continually preached and the polarization of philosophical positions regularly pointed to. Classes existed not only as social groups, but they also took on the character of institutions, they were forming into parties and states. Thus, in the West, class struggle was a struggle between two ideological camps, and in the global perspective, it was a fight between two political systems: the camp of peace, progress and brotherhood, and the camp of reaction, war and superstition. The ideological struggle was, in this context, an extension of the political struggle. The philosopher-Marxist was a representative, or as was said then, a soldier of the revolution.

Marxism-Engelsism-Leninism-Stalinism (M-E-L-S) interpreted all creations and human behaviors within categories of class, and thus in political categories. Politics engulfed all spheres of human life. In Stalinist philosophy, politics (later called 'practice') was subordinated to philosophy and was supposed to realize goals determined through historical materialism. A researcher equipped with the tools created by MELS was supposed to uncover the hidden truth, a truth waiting for the Stalinist scholar. The state, guarding the class interests of the proletariat, used philosophy for the legitimation of its actions. Philosophy, building the eschatology and theodicy of socialism, justified even the most brutal actions of the authorities. Both the persecuted and the executioners obtained supreme authority from the oracle that was MELS. MELS uncovered far-reaching and intricate paths, the goals of socialist power. It was perhaps the first time that philosophers had obtained a predominant position in the life of society.

Philosophy in Stalinism does not only designate as much as it uncovers goals and paths, which all societies tend towards; it uncovers the laws guiding social development. History is bound by a tight set of laws which with 'scientific' accuracy lead towards a communist society. Scientism – contemporary philosophy was steeped in it – was to give people hope. Because the future is on the side of the camp of progress and this is not a future drawn out from a philosopher's head, as was the case in utopian socialism but based on the scientific view of history. History, this great whole, in which the absolute that preexists us comes true, leads to a fundamentally better society that is qualitatively different but in which a reconciliation of man with himself and with others will take place, and all the highest values of humanity will be realized.

History, equipped with an ultimate and unequivocal goal, forces the application of violence. Violence is something unavoidable, it is written into the historical account. Without it, the transformation of society could not be carried out. Feudalism and capitalism were founded on it. Violence is perhaps something painful, and itself something evil, but subordinated to a higher goal it leads towards good. Marxist theodicy, similarly to all theodicies, Leszek Kołakowski wrote, is a method of converting facts into values, meaning 'a method, thanks to which, a fact is not that what appears due to empirical imagination, but moreover it is an ingredient of an order that is tied teleologically, which gives a specific sense to all its parts... Faith in eschatology, just like faith in theodicy, is an attempt to find in our lives support and reasons placed elsewhere and containing an attribute of

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the absolute.³ The absolute values all injustices when they occur in the name of Understanding, History, and the ComParty. The absolute domesticated by Communists provides reliable and incontestable directions for action, justifies everything that appears proper and progressive, takes away responsibility from the individual person for their actions, passing it on to the collectivity: class, party, or state. The individual does not operate in their own name any more; acting instead as a representative of a larger whole.

A simplification of one's own world view went hand in hand with shaping an opponent, and simplifying their views. In sum, it created one language, depleted impersonal stylistic clichés arose and were amplified in various contexts with the same stubbornness. Each analysis, each critique was prepared before its beginning and was constructed on the set of assumptions in such a way that each uncomfortable fact, each doubt found its explanation within the set of ideological myths, myths serving any self-deception and blinding of reality.

The activity of the school then indeed started from a critique, or rather it could be said, from the exposure and denudation of these myths. It began with the questioning of unity myths, then the myth of the besieged fortress, the myth of the bicolored world, and only in subsequent works were they to reach further; they discredited the cheap optimism of Stalinist ideology, the principle of determinism, of universal classness [*wszechklasowość*]. The edifice of Stalinist philosophy as a compact whole crashed down with unusual speed. Those who first accepted it, were to contribute most to its destruction. Their fight with Marxism lasted the longest. For philosophers, growing out of other traditions of thought it was a fight with something foreign, imposed, something that came from the outside, which they accepted, at most, as a safety net. For the representatives of the Warsaw School of the Historians of Ideas it was a fight inside of them, a fight with temptation and temptation fulfilled, a fight with their own biography conducted in a language in which that temptation was formed. Thus this strife was even more difficult and even more, perhaps, thrilling. This second 'self', with which they were grappling did not exist only inside themselves. It had the character of an institution which persisted and could not be detached from its roots and genesis, and therein write off the whole past. Because this could only constitute a break with the system. Kołakowski's and Baczko's struggle was thus a struggle with the ruling camp which could not break away from Stalinist principles. Thereby it could be and it was a dispute politically interpreted. Through these same methods too, was it to be resolved.

³ Leszek Kołakowski, 'Kapłan i błazen. (Rozważania o teologicznym dziedzictwie współczesnego myślenia)', in Leszek Kołakowski, *Pochwała niekonsekwencji. Pisma rozproszone z lat 1955-1968*, ed. Zbigniew Mentzel, (Londyn: Puls, 1989), 164-165.

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The representation of the worldview of the school (common views are of interest to me, and not the ideas of individual representatives) encounters a fundamental obstacle. All of them, with the exception of Leszek Kołakowski, categorically renounced philosophizing. They took on the role of historians, interpreters, hermeneutists, who to a faint degree engaged in a representation of their own methodology, as if a single and the same methodological canon was mandatory for all, so universal and clear that it needed no introduction. They considered themselves to be investigators of distant and closed wholes, of thought systems. The past in their analyses does not receive evaluation, no dialogue is carried on with it, and they do not juxtapose their own reasons and attitudes with it. All these works are marked by the same tone of voice, identical with regard to both first-rate and secondary thinkers. Each interpretation contains the same dosage of passion and reserve, as well as the same amount of interest and distance. They are all opponents of presentism. And such a position seems justified as a reaction to Stalinism, to the engagement of disputes and a tradition for the justification of ad hoc policy.

The worldview of the school can indeed be read as a mirror image of Stalinism. I have spoken already of presentism. One can also mention their aversion towards sociology or rigorously conceived determinism. But it should be once more emphasized that in their case it is not a simple rejection of the entire Marxist heritage. For many years after October 1956, the majority of the school were called Marxists, they dealt with Marxism and preached about the need for the development of this line of thought and its opening to contemporary philosophical concepts.

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The concept of historicism was to become key for the school. Baczkowski and Szacki broadly wrote about it. In the majority of works one can find citations from the well-known article by Karl Mannheim 'Historicism', as well as the works of Gyorgy Lukacs and Lucien Goldmann. There they searched for inspiration and research tools. Historicism is closely related, in turn, to the so-called German tradition of sociological knowledge.

They all explicitly express the conviction that there exists a dependence between the social practice of a community, the situation of a group and spiritual creations. The development of philosophy and ideology is delineated, in large measure, through factors outside theory, belonging to the so-called existential ground of knowledge. Social and historical change decides on the change in the form, expression and content of ideology. Thus is born the necessity to complement immanent research – i.e., limited to the thought itself – with the socio-historical perspective. In this spirit, Szacki wrote *Counterrevolutionary Paradoxes*, Walicki *The Slavophile Controversy*, and Baczkowski –

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introduction to French enlightenment philosophy. 'A worldview is a rational structure of social genesis; thus research of a worldview cannot be limited to imminent analysis. The description of the model of a given worldview and grasping its developmental dynamic is impossible without discovering its sociological content, or without establishing the relationship between its structure and the historical structures of social life.'⁴ This was Andrzej Walicki's methodological credo. Baczko analyzed the relationship between 'the abstraction of Enlightenment philosophy and the development of commodity-capitalist economics.'⁵

Searching for these sociological relationships was a pursuit of the relationships between the whole that is the socio-economic system and the one which is the worldview or false consciousness. 'The other particularity differentiated in my version of historicism', wrote Jerzy Szacki, 'is, so it seems, the conviction of synchronicity social phenomena, according to which there is a more or less close correspondence between different spheres of human activity in a given period and in a given place'. The considerations of Montesquieu on the spirit of law, Savigny on the spirit of nations, or Marx on the relationships between structure and superstructure are examples of such inquiries.

The primary category for inquiry is the worldview, a whole vision of the world, in which the system's epistemological, ethical and aesthetic values fit, and which creates the internally consistent whole and objectivizes itself in philosophical and theological works, as well as in poetry, novels and drama. A worldview connects particular categories of thought and the use of the category enables the integration of the humanities.

In their view the history of thought cannot be divided into different narrow categories, as can be the case in the history of philosophy or the history of political thought or that of ethics. The foundations proper to an epoch permeate through each other, and specifically traditionally accepted categories are the demonstration of a more general attitude through which a person imagines themselves, their time, and tries to make sense of the reality in which they live. Inquiry into a worldview is inquiry into an idea.

The worldview researched by historians of ideas is built out of a knowledge not available to many. Such knowledge consists of works by writers most conscious of their own time and of their own self. Inquiries, such as those carried out into conservatism, romanticism, or the Enlightenment were delimited from the common worldview, from what one is able to grab hold of in empirical inquiries. Historians of the Warsaw School were interested above all in the slow formation of the tendency and stylistics of the epoch, they emphasized in their inquiries more logical relationships (for example, between Enlightenment determinism and the concept of freedom) than empirical ones. The

⁴ Andrzej Walicki, *W kręgu konserwatywnej utopii. Struktura i przemiany rosyjskiego słowianofilstwa*, (Warszawa: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1964), 9-10.

⁵ See Bronisław Baczko, 'Filozofia francuskiego Oświecenia i poszukiwanie człowieka konkretnego', in Bronisław Baczko, *Człowiek i światopogląd*, (Warszawa: Książka i wiedza, 1965), 13.

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translation and interpretation of certain values and events were carried out by appealing to the whole in which this element was situated. Only at that time, did a given category become understood and gained its proper sense. This whole and not its specific values was truly the subject of social change.

They were interested above all in the question: 'why?'; why did this atomistic concept of society or utilitarianism appear? Questions posed less often, or not at all, were about how the Enlightenment was born, how it was accepted and in what way and in what character the worldview of philosophers was to become the common worldview of people.

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The Warsaw historians of ideas operated under the assumption that knowledge is created socially, that it undergoes change along with its formation in social structure, above all in the class structure. Use of the concept of class does not signify a resignation from the usage of other categories to describe social structures, though it did not signify the inscribing as a given a once adopted rigid model onto various societies. The development of Marxism – about which the mouthpieces of the school wrote – is founded on opening up to new problems, on the just forming expanses of reality. The development of Marxism stands for unending work on the language with which one describes the world, the creation of new and the reinterpretation of old concepts. The fact of indicating the class conditions of thought does not predetermine already, as it was in the Stalinist sociology of knowledge, epistemological value or moral ideas. In order to assess the epistemological values of a given ideology, we can use criteria elaborated by the modern methodology of social science (Szacki). In turn, for Kołakowski, meaningful are those philosophies, those ideological declarations, which open a person to action, expression and can be valued through this, as much as they contribute to the humanization of interpersonal relations, for people to take responsibility for themselves and their surroundings.

8

Historicism, in the Warsaw School version, shows that any thought, any recognition is partial and particular, that it is not able to move beyond its own time, human needs and aspirations. Any thought takes on the character of false consciousness, it is always mistaken or incomplete consciousness, though it simultaneously presents itself as a universally human thought. The goal of the historian is to uncover the hidden assumptions and premises of philosophy and ideology, these assumptions were not and could not be clear to those who created and passed them on. 'In an alienated historical consciousness, a person experiences themselves, their own personality as a detailing of impersonal values

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and points of the intersection of anonymous processes and necessities.⁶ Discovery of the sense of life, of the sense of history is interpreted inside of consciousness rendered absolute as the attainment of the absolute pre-existing the individual, as conferring the universal and ever-lasting sense to subjective values. No thinker, say the historians of ideas, is capable of identifying alienating processes, the truth about itself. No thinker is capable of controlling the processes which make up their thought.

Any understanding, reaching the essence of a thing, is condemned to be useless. Epistemological effort can be interpreted as a constant need to understand, to give sense to the world, to make one's own environment transparent, where one can act; this need is inherent to all.

An understanding of ideology as false consciousness was both a discovery and an introduction to the issue of alienation into Polish thought. Readings from the so-called young Marx, the early writings of Lukacs and Sombart find their own expression in the subsequent works of the historians. Alienation, as the representatives of the school understood it, is a utopia (Kolakowski wrote: "a program of ousting reified ties from collective life is characterized by a utopianism too overt, to be rendered useful for reflection...'). The theory of alienation is *de facto* a theory of all social reality, and not exclusively a theory of capitalism. Alienation describes the relationship between the world in its completed forms, the objective world, and the personal world. The struggle with alienation is only a struggle for limitation, and not about entirely ousting the processes of fetishization.

The discovery of the anthropological roots of Marxism is, at the same time, a discovery of these values, which cannot be applied to the current political situation, or to class conditions, and simultaneously serve as the basis of social and political claims. Marxism in the view of the Warsaw School, becomes, above all, a moral philosophy; its message applied to all people and social groups. Bringing the anthropological content of Marxism to the fore will allow, in future, its proponents to come to an understanding with other ideological currents, and find their own place in the world of liberal and conservative values.

Historians from the Warsaw School do not believe in the existence of such a group, whose position or perspective would allow them to go beyond particularism and reach a social reality unencumbered with practical interests. Neither the Marxist proletariat nor Mannheim's intelligentsia can reach the objective truth.

9

The thesis that any cognition is partial and limited, leads to a conclusion that any and thus also our knowledge is doomed to contingency. Historicism shows that a person does not exist in the world possessing a finished, stable sense specifying what they should

⁶ Bronisław Baczko, 'Od autora', in Baczko, *Człowiek i światopogląd*, 8.

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do with themself. 'This is not history, not social processes that impose finished schemas of thought, but this sense is created through a person or a social group, in which the person is embedded. In history, solutions do not preexist beyond individual and collective possibilities, or tasks taken on.'⁷ (Baczko) Reality does not exist alone, it always appears as a correlation of human consciousness, as a space in which we inscribe our own experiences and goals. 'Nothing is meaningful and deliberate in itself, irrespective of the people; and before the person confers meaning onto it and onto the human being itself, one can only ask why some succeed better than others in the act of this humane ennoblement of life and giving it substance, and others do not succeed at all'.

The strain of giving substance, of searching for a hidden essence, which fulfills itself in history, is unproductive. It can lead to, at most, the production of vindictive – meaning accepting evil – eschatology and theodicy. Absolutes created by man have only a symbolic character. No substantial reality corresponds to them.

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The modern philosopher can only be a critic and interpreter of myths created by great and wretched predecessors. His role is the role of a critic, a hermeneutist, but never as a creator. We can choose one of two roles: one is the role of a priest, a philosopher fixating on the absolute; the second role is that of a jester, who puts in doubt everything that is obvious. Even a priest is only a reciter of old truths. There is no place today for a prophet or a founder of new religions. Culture – historians of ideas seemed to think – has expended its creative potential. What remains then is to re-read the entire legacy of the past, to submit it to a skeptical and contemptuous reading. The Warsaw historians choose the role of critics, unmasking that what passes as unshakable, revealing that which seems evident, showing the futility and even pestilence of accepting absolutes.

The jester does not discuss, does not debate, does not say what it is like or how it should be. He shows the traps and dangers for thoughts, the intrigues and limitations inherent in philosophy. The jester does not counter-pose his own reasons against the reasons of others. He knows that nothing is certain, that there are no unshakable truths. He does not proselytize, but only warns.

Thus it is difficult to argue about whether a given thought, a given philosophy truly reaches some truth about the world and about man. There are no such tools that would allow the settling of a dispute over the value of a given thought. Every effort to know and make sense of reality is in essence equally valuable and important. The historian must then describe everything, not discriminating what is more important or interesting than philosophy and ideology.

⁷ See Baczko, 'Od autora', 9.

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The role of historians is ultimately based on showing the continuity of certain conflicts, questions, threads, and styles of thinking. Inquiries into utopia, the idea of the nation, and concepts of history allow us to grab hold of the basis of historical change.

The Warsaw School of the Historians of Ideas searched for universal and lasting questions, assumptions concerning the nature of man, the meaning of history, and the organization of society. They were less interested in what a given idea meant in its own time, and how it was received.

Saint Augustine, Husserl, Marx held their curiosity as recurring attempts in European culture to find the realization of values in history. The French counter-revolution was interesting not as much because of what it was for Europe at the time, but as a discussion over how one can be a counter-revolutionary, and at the same time, not reach out for revolutionary methods. ONR [The National Radical Camp] and Socialist Realism were connected as two attempts to give art narrowly utilitarian goals.

Their historicism was thus only partial. From the scholarly perspective of the school, there were no people who were alive and concrete making choices without knowing their consequences. They were not interested in history seen with a 'humanistic coefficient'. They were occupied by culture, in which constantly repeated attempts are visible to search for authority and to build a society of free people, and a striving to live according to an elaborate model and opening up to spontaneity and contingency. In history, they were mainly interested in the grammar of culture. They carried out an explanation of a given value, of an idea, either via referencing the historical whole in which it was immersed, or through finding such a formula, a model of which the particularities are known. ONR will therefore be meaningful for us not through how it functioned in the political life of the Second Republic of Poland, 1918-1939, but as an ideology postulating a complete transformation of all social ties. Saint Augustine will, in turn, be understood when we present him as one of the philosophers searching for the absolute realized in history. We understand the counterculture movement, in turn, when we say that it is an expression of modern romantic yearnings or also a new attempt to revive utopian thinking.

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Time for a summary. A series of works written inside or inspired by the Warsaw School of the Historians of Ideas certainly stands and will stand as a lasting canon of the Polish humanities. Such works must include, for example, Bronisław Baczko's monograph on Rousseau, Jerzy Szacki's work on counterrevolutionary paradoxes, Andzej Walicki's study of Russian thought, and Leszek Kołakowski's work on religious thought. The School, thanks to its receptivity and openness, introduced a number of new areas of inquiry, and brought

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Polish readers closer to previously unknown trends of thought. The School stood strongly for the academic canon of practicing science, defending the principles of objectivity, tolerance and the independence of science from any outside authorities, above all, from the ruling authority. Their critique of Marxism managed to break those myths which are unfortunately still present in Western political thought, myths which lead to blindness and an inability to perceive reality. In place of the Stalinist conception of engagement and partisanship, the principle of scholarly neutrality was introduced, along with anti-dogmatism and pluralism. But the post-Stalinist treatment had a purely negative character. In place of fanaticism skepticism was proposed, bias was replaced with an aversion to any kind of programmatic schema. The School stopped in the circle of obvious and incontestable values, but the Warsaw historians rediscovered principles that for hundreds of years constituted the role of intellectuals. They realized that if the right to free thinking and independence of judgement, were undermined, that would be concomitant with an agreement to tyranny or totalism. These values turned out to be inalienable for all societies, regardless whether they are called capitalist or socialist. These values are obvious and necessary to adopt if one wants to defend the intelligentsia ethos. They did not ask themselves the question, however, how it happened that these principles were broken; why against one's self a dual scale of values was used, and one accepted the myths of the besieged fortress and the myth of unity. The defense of basic values became a goal in itself, it was not, nevertheless, a basis for creating their own, independent style of thinking. Leaving Stalinism, they stopped half way. They rejected the schematic way of philosophizing, but defended themselves against independent philosophizing. Recognizing that every thought leads to self-denial, to a betrayal of values that gave rise to the thought caused apprehension towards a clear self-designation, towards a choice of one's own position. Open to reality, they preached the right to criticism, they demanded ethics without codes, but it was an appeal as equally abstract to that of French philosophers for the right to reason. They came out in favor of the right to free speech, for the independence of scholarly inquiry, the right to criticize, but they never gave themselves permission to use these rights.

TRANSLATED BY Zachary Mazur AND Agata Tumiłowicz