

THINKING ON THE PUBLIC SPACE: CEZARY WODZIŃSKI, HANNAH ARENDT

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Abstract

Focussed on Heidegger's philosophy there is the important relationship between Polish authors, Wodźński, Michnik, Tischner, Michalski and French deconstructionism (Derrida, Deleuze), also with Italian postmetaphysics (Vattimo, Agamben). The research method rely on the analysis and interpretation of the texts of Martin Heidegger (Black Notebooks especially), Hannah Arendt (Denktagebuch, especially) and other writings about Heidegger's controversy. One of the purposes is to make more in value the works by Cezary Wodźński, the recently deceased Polish philosopher, especially a series of his books and articles about understanding of the Heideggerian philosophy. It is difficult to conceive of any serious studies of metaphysics and its contemporary understanding, without a reference to his work on Heidegger. His originality holds its own in comparison to the proposals of international authors such as Derrida, Deleuze or Vattimo. We are interested in his assessment of post-modernity – the erosion of values, or their lack, the attitude towards the Holocaust, the need for high culture, the question of responsibility on a personal and political plane – and the manner of wording the postmodern philosophical problems, are still insufficiently known and understood. Cezary Wodźński, the truly important Polish philosopher, deceased in 2016, and co-created the Polish philosophical environment at the turn of the 20th and 21st century, was a real spiritus movens of many projects of the community, starting with the magazine "Aletheia", which was transformed into a publishing house, through many years of editing the "Przegląd Filozoficzny" ("Philosophical Review") to organizing international debates and conferences (including at the IWM in Vienna). His lectures and seminars at the University of Warsaw and the Jagiellonian University gathered dozens of listeners. His translation activity brought Polish readers closer to difficult works such as Heidegger's Nietzsche.

Keywords: public space, Cezary Wodźński, Hannah Arendt

It is often said that the twentieth century has been devoid of political thinkers who can stand comparison with Locke or Mill or Marx, let alone with Hobbes, Aristotle or Plato. It is almost equally often said that this strange vacuum exists only in what might be called 'Anglo-Saxon political thinking' – in the United States and Britain—the suggestion being that continental Europe has been in continual intellectual ferment. The tranquility of British politics has meant that there has been no great pressure to rethink the intellectual foundations of social and political life.

One thing to be said about these contrasts is that most compelling twentieth-century philosophy has been anti-political or unpolitical. Was Jean-Paul Sartre very persuasive as a political analyst? Martin Heidegger's brief flirtation with the Nazis was not a considered attempt to derive political conclusions from his analysis of human being, Albert Camus remains vastly more impressive as a novelist than as a political thinker. Marxist theorists were rather political actors than political thinkers. The next point is perhaps more important. The twentieth century has been a century of doubts about reason and State. The success of the Nazis who were avowedly contemptuous of rationality brought home both to their supporters and to their victims the limited success of appeals to reason in political affairs. The rise of analytical, anti-metaphysical philosophy gave intellectuals rather strong grounds for doubting whether there was such a thing as rational moral commitment. Books like Ayer's *Language, Truth and Logic* popularized the notion that moral expressions were a sort of emotional bludgeon rather than candidates for truth or falsehood. This was called the "boo-hooray" theory of ethics because of the way in which it analyzed statements like "democracy is better than fascism" as 'democracy hooray, fascism boo'. Thinkers like Max Weber struggled to explain the paradoxical ways in which reason and unreason interacted.

The latest attempt to reconstruct liberalism's defences against blind reaction and wild utopianism was

being made by John Rawls, a Professor of Philosophy at Harvard University, who had been patiently working away at the fundamental principles of liberalism from the mid-1950s. Rawls and Habermas have claimed both that the very conception of citizens' rights, adequately understood, first of all must comprise democratic rights of participation together with those of 'negative' liberty, and that secondly, 'liberal' and 'democratic' rights must be conceived as being internally related in such a way that private ('negative') and public ('positive') freedom mutually imply each other, so that, strictly speaking, the one is unthinkable without the other. It seems obvious that at least Rawls does not mean by 'public autonomy' what Arendt means by 'public freedom', since for Rawls, 'public autonomy' would have to be spelled out in terms of passive and active voting rights, of representative bodies, democratic procedures, and so on – that is, in terms that are certainly insufficient for reformulating Arendt's ideas of 'direct' democracy, of the 'acting in concert' of free and equal citizens, of a *communicative* public freedom, as we could call it, following Habermas. The latter, in contrast to Rawls, has explicitly tried to integrate an Arendtian conception of public freedom and of 'communicative power' into a rights-based theory of deliberative democracy.

The most decisive parameters of the human condition are now shaped in the areas the institutions of the nation-state cannot reach. The powers which preside over preservation and change of those conditions are increasingly globalized, while the instruments of the citizen's control and influence, however potent they might be, remain locally confined. 'Multiculturalism' in Bauman's view means, in a nutshell, the separation of citizenship from the cultural assignment and self-ascription of the citizens.

As for so many theorists in the western tradition, a permanent point of reference for Hannah Arendt is the ancient world, and in particular the Greek *polis*. In the *polis* where public life is developed to a high degree, the conditions existed whereby citizens could together deliberate about common purposes. In the exchange of unique points of view upon topics of common concern, opinion is formed and individuality developed. People are both united and separated. Politics, deliberation and presentation of the self in public space, marked by the desire to excel rather than to dominate, is seen as a vital component of the active life. Through an undetermined talking out of ourselves in public spaces, along with our fellows, action (which includes speech) flourishes. In the Greek view, according to Arendt, it is through immortal words and deeds, deathless acts celebrated in the endless talk of others, that human life attains significance.

There is already a critical tradition based on Hannah Arendt's works, especially *A Report on the Banality of the Evil*, what seems to be confronted with others philosophers, represented by Gershom Scholem; the controversy is expressed in their letters. In Poland, that controversy goes through Martin Heidegger's philosophy in Cezary Wodzinski interpretation what is still a challenge. Especially *Metaphysics and Metapolitics*, written last year of the author's life, which discuss Martin Heidegger's *Black Notebooks* demands to confront new political, social and philosophical circumstances.

Before the Peter Trawny study about, and also *Banalite de Heidegger* by Jean-Luc Nancy, one of his goals was to point to Arendt's conceptual contributions to a postmetaphysical understanding of democracy. Hannah Arendt's thought, discussed by Wodzinski in *Swiatlocienie zla (Clair-Obscur of the Evil)*, emerges from Martin Heidegger's philosophy, and goes sometime against the dominant traditions of modern political -- and antipolitical -- thought. Next important context is introduced by Paul Ricoeur's hermeneutics about question on the Evil.

Martin Heidegger's philosophy in Cezary Wodzinski interpretation remains still a challenge. Three years after the Polish philosopher has died his life achievements deserves to be more widely known and popularized also outside Poland. For this research main could be works by Arendt, Derrida, Levinas and Ricoeur. In *Swiatlocienie zla (Clair-Obscur of Evil)*, Arendt's position discussed by Wodzinski is based on her *Eichmann in Jerusalem*: Evil is present in small banal decisions of everyone. Ricoeur's hermeneutics, what becomes the perspective of Wodzinski, appear as destroying such evidences. Hermeneutic thought quits any further search for the answer to the mythical question 'Why?'. The biblical symbolic of Evil turns out to be a tale of human beings ever entwined with being, with Evil, which becomes the adventure of being, a part of the history of being, remaining human Evil. One can say: 'Evil is that which is, and which should not be', does it not place on one level two categories from different discursive and philosophic orders, *Sein*, and *Sollen*? Also Jacques Derrida's *Violence et*

metaphysique is discussing the problem in that perspective, Wodzinski assumes Heideggerian's thought to confirm the relevance of diverse suspicions.

Truly, Cezary Wodziński was the most sophisticated thinker of Poland by our time of the *wint of change*. Born at 1959 in Lebork (North of Poland) he became in Warsaw a contemporary and friendly acquaintance of the historian and future chief editor of "Gazeta Wyborcza", Adam Michnik. In many ways Wodzinski's career can be seen in parallel to that of his great friend. Like Adam Michnik, Wodzinski attended the Warsaw University and in his early life was a devoted partisan of the political engagement against communism seen as a one of two totalitarianisms from XX Century. That engagement means also a philosophical and literary movement that emphasized the clearing away of outdated prejudice and the application of philosophic reason to be free in every area of human life.

In that moment both friends in Poland considered Leszek Kołakowski, profesor who immigrated to UK, as most important Polish thinker. Both also were engaged in the intellectual friendship with prominent Polish philosopher Jozef Tischner. What was connected to his many research trips into Vienna and München (on behalf of Krzysztof Michalski, director of Institute for Human Sciences, also one of best friends of Tischner and Michnik), suddenly Wodzinski underwent a sort of conversion that involved giving up his commitment to the modern politics in favor of a more orthodox view of philosophy and metaphysics. As a consequence, he embarked on a career of trenchant and often scathing criticism of the political thought. This change in world-views coincided with his reading of the metaphysics by classic philosophers: from Heidegger to Saint Thomas, from Hannah Arendt to Plato. Wodzinski saw the idealism of the formers and the skepticism of the later as constituting a *reductio ad absurdum* of political thought: philosophical reason leads us inevitably either to doubt or to deny the reality of the world around us.

That's because three from Wodzinski's works are carried along by a surge of particular significance: *Heidegger and the Problem of Evil*, *Clair-Obscur of Evil*, *Metaphysics and Metapolitics*. The last book shows exactly why the author was opposed to the political thought with an indirect and ironic mode of discourse emphasizing the importance of metaphysic experience and the role of genius in intuiting nature (choosing the life by the almost desert lake¹); his views on language and his influential criticisms of political thought expressed in the ironic essay *Kapłana blaznem*, an indirect commentary on *Kapłan i blazen* by Leszek Kołakowski. Wodziński's rejection of the politics was greeted with distress by his friends, Kołakowski, Michalski, Michnik and Tischner. Although they hoped that he could be won back to the cause of politics, these hopes were dashed with the publication in of *Kapłana blaznem* and the following years the *Logo nieśmiertelności*, *Kairos* and *Odys gość*. Together these three works offer a world-view that might be considered as a whole one.

How then does the text of the *Immortality logo* („Logo nieśmiertelności”) accomplish the defense of metaphysic Wodzinski desires? Here Wodzinski relies not so much on Socrates but rather on Plato, whose skeptical writings had affected him so deeply a few years before. Plato would doubtless have found little to his liking in Wodziński's rejection of the politics, but Wodzinski found much in Plato to serve his purposes. Instead, Wodzinski makes use of the figure of Socrates as a cadaver: The birthplace of platonism is Socrates death. Plato wasn't interested by Socrates funeral. One might compare Socrates to someone refusing to join a politic game as a game of cards: If this person didn't know how to play, we might take their refusal as an expression of incapacity, much as we would take an expression of ignorance from an ordinary as a genuine indication that he lacks knowledge. But in the case of Socrates, who was manifestly a deep thinker and great philosopher, professions of ignorance must be read as refusals to participate in a game in which the other players break the rules of the game and steal its joy.

In *Logo nieśmiertelności* (*Immortality logo*) specifically Wodzinski holds up Plato, writting successor of Socrates, the philosophers' secular saint, in order to draw an unfavorable contrast between him and the traditional Enlightenment. First quotation of the book comes from *Phaidros: Speak only*. Despite his wisdom, Socrates explicitly renounced his claim to know the answers to the questions he asked; rather than taking and defending determinate positions on the issues he was interested in. Socrates engaged his

¹ *Ublick Ublick Anblick Überblick Urblick Augenblick : legenda typologiczna*, „Przegląd Polityczny” 2017, nr 143, s. 36–39, first „Borussia” 2014 nr 54, s. 120–128.

listeners in conversation so as to bring them to realize that they did not know the answers to these questions any more than Socrates did. Similarly, Wodzinski intends the *Immortality logo* to show that political thinkers are (at least) as far from genuine knowledge as he is. Finally, like all of Wodzinski's works, the style of the *Logo nieśmiertelności (Immortality logo)* is intentionally opaque: In contrast to the Enlightenment emphasis on universal truths that transcend the time and place in which they are expressed, Wodzinski fills his text with oblique allusions to a wide variety of texts in several languages; moves from one point to another with little indication of how the various passages are supposed to hang together; and shifts without warning from careful argumentative analysis to citation of texts to something like oracular declamation. As a result, it is impossible for the reader to forget that the text he is reading is the work of a particular individual writing in a particular time and place, rather than expressing timeless deliverances of reason.

Hannah Arendt, permanent Wodzinski's reference, wrote about *Nicomachean Ethics* that starting from that moment immortality becomes much more interesting than death. My presentation points to the (non)possibility of integrating Arendt's idea of political freedom into a rights-based theory of democracy, in the sense in which both J. Rawls and J. Habermas have emphasized the interdependence of 'private' and 'public' autonomy for any viable modern conception of democracy. According to Bauman's theory, we are all translators; *translation is the common feature in all forms of life*. Wodziński offers a whole book, *Kairos*, dedicated to Zygmunt Bauman, as a preparation to translation of two inscriptions by Paul Celan. Wodzinski's intention in the *Kairos* is to offer a defense of poetic language that renders such metaphysics immune against rational attack while in no way accepting the political terms of debate. In order to do this, however, he faces a seemingly insoluble problem: He must undermine the grounds of the political view of philosophy and metaphysics without committing himself to other, opposed positions that are subject to rational criticism and refutation. Several aspects of how he goes about this were very influential in Polish, Russian and German thought in the XXth century. First, the main ideas are spoken under a silent dialogue, or rather, not under any word at all. The first page of *Kairos* says that two men, Martin Heidegger and Paul Celan, met „*Ins Hüttenbuch, mit dem Blick auf den Brunnenstern, mit einer Hoffnung auf ein kommendes Wort im Herzen. Am 25. Juli 1967/Paul Celan*”. In Todtnerberg Celan wrote:

die in dies Buch
geschriebene Zeile von
einer Hoffnung, heute,
auf eines Denkenden
kommendes
Wort
im Herzen.

The objective of the presentation is to come back to the continental heritage of philosophy seen from the aspect of international controversy about Heideggerianism and Heidegger's commitment to the Nazi politics. From the 1930s through the 1970s the German philosopher Martin Heidegger kept a running series of private writings, the so-called *Black Notebooks*. The recent publication of the *Black Notebooks* volumes from the war years have re-sparked international quarrel. While Heidegger's engagement with National Socialism was well known, the *Black Notebooks* showed for the first time that this anti-semitism was not merely a personal resentment. *Black Notebooks* contain not just anti-semitic remarks, they show Heidegger incorporating basic tropes of anti-semitism into his philosophical thinking.

Certainly, Wodzinski's life achievement deserves to be more widely known and popularized also outside Poland, which can be achieved i.a. by inviting foreign guests to a workshop meeting to enable them to familiarize themselves with this subject. Moreover, what was presented by Wodziński in *Światłocienie zła (Clair-Obscur of Evil)*, for Hannah Arendt, Heidegger's disciple author of famous *Banality of the Evil* concerning Eichmann's process in Jerusalem, and *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, the darkness of our times occurs because the spaces in which our humanity may come into existence are closed off, and the

conditions for freedom are no longer understood. As for so many theorists in the western tradition, a permanent point of reference for Hannah Arendt is the ancient world, and in particular the Greek *polis*. In the *polis* where public life is developed to a high degree, the conditions existed whereby citizens could together deliberate about common purposes. This is the issue coming from Arendt, a space of philosophical interpretation of the Holocaust was established not only in the 'negative' sense theology; some of Jewish theologians seriously consider Heideggerian philosophy.

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