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MARXIST TRAIT OF REVISIONISM: LESZEK KOŁAKOWSKI'S CONSISTENT TRANSITION TO INCONSISTENT PHILOSOPHY

Introduction

Leszek Kołakowski belongs to philosophers in the case of whom comments on their works almost every time contain some references to biographical facts. One of the circumstances of his biography that particularly attracts people's attention and causes moral judgments is Kołakowski's ideological conversion, especially his youthful Marxist involvement. For example, recently there was a significant political argument in Radom, the city he comes from, about putting a monument of Kołakowski on the city's square because of his early communist past (Ciepielak, 2016).

In this article I intend to describe theoretical reasons that stood behind Kołakowski's transition from being an orthodox Marxist to becoming an actual leader of the Polish revisionist movement. This issue was elaborated before, however, always in the context of the change that the young author had undergone, while my intention is to concentrate on the aspects of his thought that did not change, the ideas that were common to the young author of *Sketches of Catholic Philosophy*¹ and to the creator of an opposition between a priest and a jester. For I assume there are some noticeable joint threads of these two phases of his creativity, motifs that so far have not been interpreted in this way, some ideas that Kołakowski constantly approved of and that remained valuable for him also after his transformation in the 1950s.

¹ The titles of Kołakowski's works published before 1955 are translated by the author, the next ones, from the period 1955-1957 – by George L. Kline (Kline, 1971, p. 239-250); all remaining – by the authors of particular translations.

I also try, as far as it is possible, to pass over Kołakowski's biography (understood as a set of life events). I want to avoid all the attempts to value his actions, I skip all psychologizing efforts to explain the reasons of his stepping into Marxism and, consequently, abandoning it. The aim of this paper, then, is to show that the revisionist thaw was not only contrary to a soulless system (as it is usually presented), but also was the consequence of the development of Kołakowski's thought that genuinely, in some important part, stood unchanged. There is something that may be called the core of his philosophy.

I am aware that such attempt may be interpreted as some kind of absolution of Kołakowski's early writings, because the ideas I link with him do have rather positive associations. Answering to that I can just say that basically people choose (consciously or not) righteous ideas to lead them through their lives. The circumstance that someone proclaims and follows noble slogans is morally irrelevant as long as they are generally described and considered regardless of practice. And this is the way I want to present three basic traits of Kołakowski's early papers.

Inability of completability

First of the major features of whole Kołakowski's thought can be briefly described as 'anti-code'. The basis of this idea was clarified in the article from 1962 titled *Ethics without a Moral Code* (Kołakowski, 1971), but, as a matter of fact, objections against the notion that it is possible to create such a theoretical concept that solves all philosophical problems and leaves people without inconvenient doubts were presented by Kołakowski since the beginning of his scientific and public activity. He never stopped being against all philosophical stagnancy broadly defined. In the Marxist stage he preferably applied his objections to science, that is he opposed something that may be called 'completability', that is, a finiteness of science. Later, at the revisionist phase, his recommendation of inconsistency concentrated on the moral part of life (the article mentioned above, *Ethics without a Moral Code*, refers only to moral issues), however the core of his considerations remained the same, i.e., the rejection of all types of monism.

And so, in 1949 in one of his first articles Kołakowski – a 22-year-old Polish socialist – pointed out the advantages of Marxism,

adjudged by him as a 'philosophy of common sense' (Kołakowski, 1949b, p. 4). He already announced that this philosophy did not sanctify prevalent tradition and basically was a fight against mental comfort and opportunism. Besides, it could lead to the rejection of the most ingrained convictions. At the end of the paper Kołakowski concluded: "There is nothing in the work of Marxist classics that Marxism would not rule out immediately, if scientific studies prove it is a lie" (Kołakowski, 1949b, p. 5)².

Marxism was never interpreted by Kołakowski as a finite system, even when he basically focused on its criticism. Moreover, one of the primary objections he formulated in *Main Currents of Marxism* referred to the ambiguity of this philosophy, to the fact that Leninism and Stalinism could have been derived from the works of Marx without distorting his thought (Kołakowski, 1978, p. 526). Evidently, young Kołakowski was not a follower of a statement that various types of philosophizing are equal (in point of fact he never made such judgment), furthermore, he was a supporter of coercing people to Marxism, as he said once, he did not see himself as a democrat (Kłoczowski, 1994, p. 21). Crucial thing is that what attracted him to Marxism was its flexibility, a contrary to the sanctified tradition. What was important for the young author and what he used to underline, was that Marxism was not an epiphany (Baczko, Kołakowski, 1954, p. 84). Kołakowski claimed it was based on science, that it took into account scientific achievements, and that, like in the case of science, its principle was the capacity of autotransgression.

It all sounds maybe a little bit naive and obvious for people living in the 21st century. Firstly, we all know how the disseminating of Marx's theory went in practice. Secondly, the requirement to include scientific discoveries seems to be natural and necessary in every respectable modern philosophical theory. It seems that nowadays all philosophical outlooks must maintain some correspondence to advances in science and technology, at least if their adherents intend to keep an elementary connection with prevalent fundamental worldview intuitions. However, things looked differently in the 1950s Poland.

Kołakowski's works from that time were basically focused on a fight with Catholic Church, especially with neo-Thomism. Considering

² Translated by the author.

the relationship between science and religion he concluded that the creed of the Church reminded a smokescreen. In line with scholastic reasoning, both of them, science and religion, are the sources of truth, but they differ in the method of argumentation (Kołakowski, 1955a, p. 18-20). They have something in common: some divine truths can be proved rationally. That is how, in Kołakowski's opinion, the Church affirms science and confirms its unparalleled achievements: by announcing that there is no contradiction between a statement based on knowledge and a statement based on faith. But in a clash, the second one must always be approved as a determining criterion (details of this notion were presented in the article *Neo-Thomism in Conflict with the Progress of the Sciences and the Rights of Man* (Kołakowski, 1955a)). For young Kołakowski it was one of the ways to show how the Church tried to preserve its impact and how it basically subjugated science.

Therefore, Marxism is a philosophy based on emancipation (Baczko, Kołakowski, 1954, p. 84). It is free from mystifications and distortions caused by class struggle and religious notions. It is more a negativity than an actual statement, and the task of Marxism is to create conditions for unrestricted development of philosophical thought (Baczko, Kołakowski, 1954, p. 84). Furthermore, in 1954 at the Polish-German Conference concerning the methodology of the history of philosophy Kołakowski, in concord with Bronisław Baczko, pointed out two crucial dangers of the prevalent stage of ideological battle. The first of them was the *a priori* rejection of the achievements of philosophical doctrines that cannot be defined as materialistic (Baczko, Kołakowski, 1954, p. 84-85).

Kołakowski did not change his view on this point even when his works began to fit into the revisionist movement. When in 1957 he summarized the International Philosophical Meeting in Warsaw he said that Marxism was not any more a homogeneous doctrine and it assumed the possibility of accepting incompatible statements based on Marxist tradition. Moreover, the inflexible division into Marxists and non-Marxists lost its meaning and could be kept only from the point of view of dogmatic orthodoxy, and that the phrase 'borders of Marxism' became unreasonable and useless (Kołakowski, 1957a, p. 224). Kołakowski made similar remarks in *The Permanent vs. Transitory Aspects of Marxism*, where he qualified all the disputes, in which

participants aimed to practice 'real' Marxism and monopolized for themselves an honorable title of 'consistent Marxists', as sterile verbalism (Kołakowski, 1968b, p. 183). As he noticed in this essay, there was no such a thing as one and only truly Marxist interpretation of any kind of philosophy and that the use of the same general rules of Marxist historical methodology could lead to various conclusions. Similar reasoning was presented in his other works from that period. For example, in *Intellectuals and the Communist Movement* Kołakowski pointed out that the fetishization of Marxism turned it into a toxin of intellectual life, instead of its blood – by that he meant that a theoretical work cannot be useful for a revolutionary movement if it was bound by anything else than an aspiration to get some authentic knowledge and a scientific rigor (Kołakowski, 1968a, p. 172). In *What do Philosophers Live on?* he stated that materialism in science is rather a scientific attitude than a doctrine (Kołakowski, 1957d, p. 19). What is noteworthy, in that time Kołakowski also started to limit the use of a communist terminology. He replaced it with such terms like 'rationalism' (*Irrationality of Rationalism*), 'consequence' – as a contrary to inconsistency (*In Praise of Inconsistency*), or 'a philosophy of an absolute' (*The Priest and the Jester*). It was a clear advancement, a move from a follower of a doctrine to a free thinker, not restricted by any dogma.

This feature characterized all Kołakowski's future works. Since the abandonment of Marxism he has never been seduced by any worldview, although he did not discredit at all an attachment to philosophical concepts that intended to say something total and overall about being. His mature philosophy is somewhere in between. However, Kołakowski remained dissatisfied for the rest of his days because a third option, an everlasting non-completion constantly troubled him and stimulated his metaphysical and ethical inquires. There are three significant works on that matter: *The Presence of Myth* (1972), *Religion: If There Is No God* (1982), *Metaphysical Horror* (1988). In the preface to the first of them Kołakowski quoted William Blake. Those words may be used as a conclusive summary of Kołakowski's biggest trouble: 'Less than All cannot satisfy Man' (Kołakowski, 1989, p. XII).

Involvement

Kołakowski not only interiorized the Marxist requirement not to limit philosophy only to theorizing but also practice it, but he also discussed this idea in his works. In other words, he did not only factually practice Marxism by his political involvement, but also was writing about the importance of engagement. The necessity of taking some actions, connected with intensively felt responsibility, is inherent in whole Kołakowski's thought. Sometimes it is mentioned evidently, sometimes its presence is indirect. Although the findings of Kołakowski's later works are faraway from hopefulness and may be summarized by the word *horror* (Kołakowski, 1988, p. 21), Polish philosopher does not take giving up as an option. His philosophy frequently does not openly oppose passiveness – such an attitude is just passed over, it is ignored because of its obvious barrenness. Therefore, statements about the nihilist reasons of Kołakowski's accession to communism, presented by Jan Tokarski in *The Presence of Evil*, should be considered as correct (Tokarski, 2016, p. 35-41). Tokarski – using partly Kołakowski's method of philosophizing (in the aspect of showing schizophrenic feature of human wishes (Kołakowski, 1986, p. 13) – points out that Marxism offered a collective nihilism, which differs from other versions of nihilism because the act of rejecting the existing world lets people keep the faith that it is possible to thoroughly fix the reality (Tokarski, 2016, p. 36).

In *Ethics without a Moral Code* Kołakowski binds the idea of responsibility for worldly debts with an act of not committing suicide (Kołakowski, 1971, p. 154-155). And yet, the refusal of repayment is vividly present and it takes two ideological forms: the nihilism of the adolescent and the conservatism of the old man (Kołakowski, 1971, p. 156). The pragmatic mettle in the first stage of Kołakowski's intellectual growth was the cause of his concentration on the second form. Nihilists are not a real threat as long as they do not grow in number. Besides, their attitude basically rules them out of public involvement. Therefore, Kołakowski's main intellectual opponent became the Catholic Church and the outlooks connected with it, i.e., neo-Thomism and Christian personalism in particular.

Kołakowski used to raise many objections against Catholic philosophy. One of the major one aimed at the passive attitude

contained in a religious message. Kołakowski amalgamated Christian ideas with the recommendation to accept habitual passiveness. In his opinion all religious ideologies make a promise that some earthly sacrifices will be paid out in the other world, but at the same time these doctrines demand to relinquish all corporeal claims (Kołakowski, 1955a, p. 31). Thomism therefore extends beyond this rule because it basically sanctifies the hierarchical rules of society, thus it particularly establishes itself as an ideological instrument of the monopolistic capital.

The issue of hierarchy founded in the Thomistic philosophy dared and provoked Kołakowski in those years. Young philosopher referred to it in his major works, such as: *On So-called Thomist Realism*, *"The Rights of the Person" versus the Rights of Man: The Essential Meaning of "Christian Personalism"* or *The Labour Question in Vatican Political Doctrine: On the Pope's So-called "Social Encyclicals"*, gathered, among others, in a book titled *Sketches of Catholic Philosophy* (Kołakowski, 1955c), published in 1955 (however, it includes works written in the years 1950-1955). The core of this idea, originated in Aristotle (Kołakowski, 1955b, p. 147), is that God predicted proper space for each being in the universe. Man is not only not allowed to change it, he is essentially unable to make such modifications. At the same time God's will sanctifies schemes necessarily connected with such values like prevailing class system or private property (Kołakowski, 1955b, p. 188-193). Therefore, all attempts to change the social order are considered not only as cases of offense against human, temporary law, they must be treated as sins, outrages of the natural or even eternal law. Kołakowski's reasoning in this case frequently was not sophisticated. For instance, he suggested that the meaning of Thomism is better understood if we replaced the word 'God' by the term 'Church' (it is a reference to Holbach (Kołakowski, 1955a, p. 13)). After such an operation all of Christian efforts to protect its traditional values, the conservative mettle, are nothing more than bourgeois and reprehensible tries to keep the domination of capitalists and they cannot be seen as something different from the desperate acts of delaying the social revolution.

Kołakowski binds in this way the Catholic philosophy with a call to passivity. The only alterations that Thomism affirms refer to the

changes of inward qualities. They happen in a spiritual dimension but do not effect a society as a collective. Marxism – as a pragmatic social philosophy – is in this view an actual antithesis to religion, the best antidote to the tremendous disease caused by this widespread opium. A historian of philosophy should not be a chronicler, the history of philosophy is not a remembrance of the past – it is an experience which should be used in an effective fight for ideological transformations (Baczko, Kołakowski, 1954, p. 78). Communism is presented, therefore, as a successor of the noblest aspirations of human kind, all the people's dreams about happiness and freedom and also – what is most important – it breaks off with the domain of wishes that always ended up in disappointment (Kołakowski, 1950, p. 291-292). All of what used to be a dream may finally be achieved. Kołakowski used a biblical metaphor: the word may ultimately become flesh (Kołakowski, 1950, p. 292).

In 1957 Kołakowski published *World-View and Everyday Life*, a set of dissertations written in 1955-1956 (Kołakowski, 1957c). The title of this book properly summarizes the pivotal tension of included articles; they basically refer to the relationship between philosophical outlooks and daily life. Kołakowski's answers are clearly presented from the revisionist point of view. In the opening essay Kołakowski asks what do philosophers do for a living. He specifies that he means the social function of philosophy as some knowledge about the world, i.e., its practical power (Kołakowski, 1957d, p. 8). His answer depends on matters that philosophers deal with. Trying to find out what is the real determinant of philosophical problems Kołakowski says that it is a reference to the formation of the social and moral attitudes of human (Kołakowski, 1957d, p. 15). Philosophical knowledge is anthropocentric accordingly. Every fact may be a subject of philosophical reflection but it actually happens only when a practical and human meaning of a fact is discovered (Kołakowski, 1957d, p. 24). In other words, a distinguishing feature of philosophical thinking is the fact that its axis is marked by social practice of humans acting as moral subjects (Kołakowski, 1957d, p. 23).

The practical aspect of Kołakowski's works created at the revisionist and the next stages of his life is easy to spot. Since the revisionist phase one of the major issue of his philosophy has been the

problem of the lack of connection between ideological conviction and daily life practice. Kołakowski paid attention to the fact that a conversion from being a Christian to being a Marxist did not necessarily lead to the change of a moral attitude (Kołakowski, 1957b, p. 34). The other problem is that even if any desirable attitude was commonly present, a sin would still not be removed from the world. People may actually know (not only suspect or believe) that it is forbidden to lie but they still may avoid telling the truth. Adam and Eve are an example: they had certainty no man ever had, God himself told them what is good and what is evil, and yet, they still did not listen to his command and committed the original sin. The final answer Kołakowski submitted was that only religion outlook made a complete offer, whereas what people know about the world actually made an effect on their behavior (Kołakowski, 1982, p. 174-178). This statement, naturally, only deals with the first problem, the one referring to moral attitude. The impossibility of avoiding the evil and getting rid of everything that is wrong seemed obvious to Kołakowski, at least since he had noticed the utopian attributes of Marxism, which happened more or less in the early 1950s.

Kołakowski repeatedly pointed out that knowing that it is impossible to completely achieve most valuable ideas is not a sufficient reason to claim that the difference between following or not following them is meaningless (Kołakowski, 1975, p. 81). Even if people have never reached perfect democracy there still is a qualitative distinction between modern liberal democracies and historical totalitarian states. People have an intuition of deficiency when they hear that the difference between earnings of Rockefeller and a dustman is only quantitative. According to political philosophy, the impossibility of achieving utopia does not mean that our tries to change current conditions are worthless and morally irrelevant.

Taking this into account, the majority of his revisionist papers focuses on pragmatic advices that are ethically formed. Kołakowski did not only write and present philosophical considerations – he gave homilies, trying not only to convince, but also to heat people's hearts. And so, in *Intellectuals and the Communist Movement* (1956) Polish philosopher makes an appeal to intellectuals, he calls them to fight: firstly, for the secularization of thinking, secondly, against pseudo-

Marxist mythology and bigotry, thirdly, against religious and magic practices, fourthly, fight for rebuilding respect for unrestrained secular reason (Kołakowski, 1968a, p. 165). In *Responsibility and History* (1957) Kołakowski tries to find some way out from two attitudes: a revolutionary and a clerkish one, telling that the recommended pose is to make efforts leading to ideological renaissance of the revolutionary Left (Kołakowski, 1968c, p. 97), specifying what does it precisely mean, and what actions does it need. And yet, the best summary of the practical intentions of Kołakowski's revisionist articles is given in his own words at the end of the famous essay written in 1958: 'So much for praise of inconsistency. The rest cannot be verbalized. The rest must be done' (Kołakowski, 1964, p. 209).

It is noteworthy that the basis of Kołakowski's intentions to influence people's morality by convincing them that both social and internal (necessarily bound with the social) modifications are not only possible but also desirable did not change. He tried to adapt his thought to alterations (aberrations) of the communist system. It shows in his attempt to tell apart two senses of Marxism: the formal one and the intellectual one. In *Permanent vs. Transitory Aspects of Marxism* (1957) Kołakowski clearly expressed that the institutional way of understanding Marxism, which the communist party used to impose, threatened the meaning that was philosophically valuable (Kołakowski, 1968b, p. 187). Someone, who treated teachings of Marx seriously (especially in his youth), must not allow ossification of his philosophy; must constantly reject all the efforts to ensure existential calm (Kołakowski 1971, p. 164); should not be a priest but a jester. As Kołakowski told us about a jester: "[he] must stand outside good society and observe it from the sidelines in order to unveil the nonobvious behind the obvious, the nonfinal behind the final; yet he must frequent society so as to know what it holds sacred and to have the opportunity to address it impertinently" (Kołakowski, 1968e, p. 34). Kołakowski's vision of Marxism remained the same; he just had to reply to the interpretation that the Polish People's Republic imposed on Marxism in those years.

Philosophy of disagreement

The last issue, the distinction between a priest and a jester, effects another constant feature of Kołakowski's thought—its antithetic attitude. This notion shows up in any attempt to synthesize his work, to give it a frame, a label, and summarize it, for the author of *In Praise of Inconsistency* never intended to create something that could be called a philosophical system, a complete theory. He was, as Barbara Skarga once joked, a kind of a skeptical metaphysician, or rather—a metaphysical skeptic (Skarga, 2002). His philosophy—if we agree that it is possible to speak about Kołakowski's philosophy at all – was by definition, inconsistent. Nonetheless, there are quite a few efforts that expose main currents of his works, and they do it successfully.

One of the cores of Kołakowski's papers should be defined as an intense feeling of disagreement with the existing, prevalent conditions. If there is something that Kołakowski owes to Marxism it is a method of combining two seemingly opposing options and showing his annoyances connected with both of them. As his thought is anti-monistic, he does not intend to find some synthesis, so in this respect he opposed dialectical tradition. And yet, his assumption that most philosophical worries can be enclosed within two extremes is a genuinely derivative of dialectical materialism. Kołakowski usually stands against both extremes.

There is a popular citation from Aristotle's *Metaphysics* that philosophy begins in wonder. Traditionally this excerpt is understood as an expression of delight of the world that surrounds us. This enchantment is a source of investigations that tend to cognize the mystery, magnificence and complexity of reality. The works of Kołakowski do not contain such affection. The foundation of his philosophical activity is a sense of disagreement, a feeling that there is something genuinely iniquitous in our perception of the world. Moreover, Kołakowski's philosophy is more diagnostic than therapeutic. He tells people about their diseases, furthermore, he points out the causes but is incapable to indicate a solution, and at most he teaches how to avoid a growth of disorders.

Hereby Kołakowski usually is presented as a historian of ideas (he even is commonly included into a group of Polish historians of ideas called Warsaw School of the History of Ideas (Walicki, 1984)), a skeptic,

and a critic. He is a jester, so he needs a good society that he may undermine and laugh at. Kołakowski is also a moralizer, he wakes people up from a blissful state of certainty, pointing out that in the case of moral issues man must never lose vigilance. In his opinion the purpose of ethics is to generate sinners that are aware of their wickedness, and not to produce saints who are certain of their own saintliness (Kołakowski, 1971, p. 175).

This description is appropriate in reference to Kołakowski's books and articles written after revisionist stage, but the indicated features occurred as well in Kołakowski's first works. In some descriptions of the beginnings of philosophy in Poland after World War II it is noticed that professional writers specialized in attacking particular concepts and their authors. For example: Adam Schaff intended to criticize the philosophy of Kazimierz Ajdukiewicz, Bronisław Baczko fought especially against Tadeusz Kotarbiński, Henryk Holland against Kazimierz Twardowski and his school, Tadeusz Kroński against Roman Ingarden and Władysław Tatarkiewicz, Robert Zimand against Stanisław Ossowski (Chudy, 1990, p. 132). Kołakowski's target was widely settled: apart from assaulting Ajdukiewicz, Tatarkiewicz, and Ingarden he focused, as it was mentioned above, on the Christian tradition represented by scholastic philosophy. Even when Kołakowski was writing about Marxism itself, he concentrated on the wrong ways of its interpretation and only mentioned the appropriate understanding and its commentary (i.e. compatible with everything that the Party did and declared). The Marxist method was commonly glorified but actually it was not adopted. This notion discloses the truth about Marxism and its philosophical barrenness that troubled Kołakowski in *Main Currents of Marxism* (Kołakowski, 1978, p. 523-530). The multiplicity of legitimate ways of interpreting Marxism does not actually lead to social, political and intellectual development, it causes either some kind of dogmatic stagnancy or a variety of concepts that keep their validity apart from their Marxist sources.

Kołakowski was aware of the fact that Marxism did not actualize its inspiring objective, what was assumed as one of its major goals. Quite meaningful are his words in *Dialectical impressions*, his first philosophical publication from 1947, that the principles of materialistic

dialectic were brought to life by the work and fight of the labour movement in the struggle for better social order more than one hundred years earlier, but it is crucial to develop Marxist theory itself (Kołakowski, 1947, p. 11). Furthermore, Kołakowski evaluated its former development as very poor (Kołakowski, 1947, p. 8).

And so, it is hard to find an article of Kołakowski written in the first, Marxist phase, that would be a solid attempt to expand the theory of Marx. Those works are basically polemic and critical. It must be taken into consideration that Kołakowski was still a young author, so a lack of ambition of creating a resolute enlargement of communist theory – even despite a radical nature of his critical works – is easily understandable and rather not surprising.

Revisionism was, by definition, directed towards something that should be called 'a proper way of understanding Marxism', so revisionists concentrated on disagreement with existing interpretation. As Kołakowski himself underlined while defining the term 'revisionism' in *Main Currents of Marxism*, it was applied to people, who attacked various communist dogmas (Kołakowski, 1978, p. 456). Revisionism was a philosophy of disagreement *per se*. This notion obviously does not deprive the revisionists of an ability to create an original, important concept, but points out that revisionism is for the Marxist doctrine like heresy is for Catholic tenet, it is a derivative supplement, a consequent. Ultimately, a revisionist does not try to create, he intends to improve, and when he does it, he usually begins with an objection.

Differences

Marxist

Trying to point out qualities that certainly changed during Kołakowski's conversion from a dogmatic Marxist to a revisionist, I must mention his leaving the institutional way of understanding Marxism and beginning its intellectual interpretation (Kołakowski, 1968b, p. 174-175). According to Kołakowski's words from 1988 main ideas of the revisionist movement are based on respect for: the truth and logical arguments, common sense, democratic values, civil rights, economic efficiency and 'other venerable things' (however, naturally, revisionists maintained the faith that the core of the system should be kept) (Kołakowski, 2002, p. 312). These issues were repeatedly described in

many earlier works, and it seems there is no need to explain them again, however the number of works delineating Polish revisionism is not as big as it can be assumed. For the purposes of this article it is important to point out and to briefly discuss some of those attributes that are relevant for Kołakowski's works and that changed substantially since he had become a revisionist.

First of them is an answer to a question how did he referred to the famous proverb, commonly, but not fully accurately, linked with Machiavelli's *The Prince*: that the end justifies the means. As a young author Kołakowski did not evince the sensitivity that characterized him later. He recounted his radicalism in the extensive interview with Zbigniew Mentzel, saying for instance, that in his youth he did not like the camouflages of PPR (Polish Workers' Party), he preferred to name it communist, not workers', he was disgusted by the fact that at the party's premises there were no portraits of Lenin or Stalin, but of Kościuszko, he saw himself as an elite member, who knows things that other people were not aware of. He knew and somehow justified the fact that the party cheated people when it acted as if it was not really close to communism and presented itself as progressive and patriotic (Kołakowski, 2007, p. 78-80). Kołakowski remembered that he had not been perceived in the 1940s as an uncertain member of the party, but rather as a sectarian, who did not intend to pretend that communism is different from what it practically was (Karpiński, Kołakowski, 2012, p. 215). And from Kołakowski's point of view communism was a tamer of Nazism, it was a myth of a better world, a longing for life without crime and humiliation, kingdom of equality and liberty (Kołakowski, 2007, p. 80). This objective seemed to naturally justify all the attempts necessary for its achievement.

Kołakowski focused on the things that sickened him and needed to be changed, he saw the reality as degenerate, and this is why he believed that bringing some additional evil should not change it notably. In his review of Peter Kropotkin's *Ethics* from 1949 he pointed out the necessity of suspending some moral principles: the human solidarity could come to life only in conditions that would appear when antagonistic aspirations of various classes vanished (Kołakowski, 1949a, p. 7). Shortly afterwards he noticed that this rule (human solidarity) remained in conflict with class struggle and that was why it

was so popular among social democratic revisionists (sic). Moreover, it is not true that all people are brothers – wrote Kołakowski in 1949 – it is merely a wish and a goal of Marxists' aspirations (Kołakowski, 1949a, p. 7). Young philosopher seemed to actually believe that a state of utopia was available. And if so, it was morally admissible to aim at this target by any means. Moreover, it was the obligation of all humans. Therefore, it should not be surprising that he did not see himself as a democrat (Kłoczowski, 1994, p. 21).

Also, the first phase of his social activity is the only one that can be called optimistic. Despite the fact that his works from that time were characterized by offensive, sometimes rough and coarse style, their reading also leads to a conclusion that everything is going to end up well, because such course of events is guaranteed by invariable historical laws. In that part Kołakowski was an unreserved Marxist. The only question was when this end was going to happen. Marxism was then a tragic remedy for one of the features of the world that Kołakowski remembered: that it was deeply sad (Kołakowski, 2007, p. 19). When the reality falsified communists' dream Kołakowski lost his hopeful attitude forever. It also roused one of the most significant aspect of his philosophical forthcoming creations: a decisive objection against all existential and moral complacency.

Revisionist

To begin the characterization of the revisionist phase I must, once again, relate to *Ethics without a moral code*. It is not an exaggeration to say that it is the most prominent essay among Kołakowski's works from that period, even a kind of theoretical manifesto. In that paper Polish philosopher several times summons 'moral intuition' and its notion basically forms some fundamental cohesion in the writings of the author of *The Presence of Myth*.

The foundation of Kołakowski's communist heresy is an act of realizing that the evil does not stop being evil when it contributes to a greater good. As he explains, there is no symmetry between obligations and values (Kołakowski, 1971, p. 176-178). It means that sometimes our duty is to do evil (like stealing food to prevent child's death from starvation), but it does not change the moral valuation of this kind of actions, a lesser evil is still an evil. This awareness leads to looking at

communists' actions more closely, it wakes up moral sensitivity focused on the evil in each of its dimension: both in global, social scale, and in common, daily life practice. Kołakowski stood up against daily mendacity. In *The Concept of the Left*, one of the classic papers of Polish revisionist movement (from 1957), Kołakowski postulated to distinguish ideology and current political tactic: the Left – as he intended to understand it – did not refuse to compromise with reality but at the same time it demanded to call such acts in a proper way, i.e., to call them compromises (Kołakowski, 1968d, p. 81-82). The Left knows (should know if it really claims to be Left) that sometimes men are powerless in the face of crimes but it does not want to qualify crimes as good, or profitable.

Also in this paper Kołakowski accepted that there was no possibility to reach utopia, though this acceptance did not allow him to conclude that it was pointless to make utopian attempts. For the Left excludes utopia from its doctrine like a pancreas discharges insulin. i.e., by its innate natural regularity (Kołakowski, 1968d, p. 70). Following a target that does not seem to be achievable, with full awareness of this fact, makes people sensible to some features of moral situations, namely that a rightful goal does not justify all lesser evils. In the paper *In Praise of Inconsistency* Kołakowski specified such experiences, and called them 'elementary situations'. What are those? Kołakowski says they are 'those human situations in which our moral attitude is unchanged regardless of the way these situations arrive at their culmination' (Kołakowski, 1964, p. 208-209). In other words, they basically are moral events, with which we deal when, no matter how notable the objectives are, we cannot justify the means (for example: genocide or mistreatment of the defenseless). The mention of them is one of major differences between a young and a revisionist Kołakowski. They cause a descent from the area of ideas to the domain of actual living. They also announce – as an exception – ethics without a moral code (as a way of Kołakowski's philosophizing, not only a paper), according to which in moral life people must always oscillate between various values, which cannot be arranged like notches on the thermometer (Kołakowski, 1971, p. 172). The attainment of a world with perfect ethical code would be contrary to some basic moral intuitions. Every total doctrine

is in practice necessarily an inevitable, and moreover, an inadmissible moral anesthesia.

This change in Kołakowski's thinking also manifests itself in the subjects of his interest. As a Marxist he concentrated on the attempts to frame the world, to describe its rules, to place current events in the march of history. However, paying attention to ethical issues, as described above (in the excerpt about involvement), woke him from 'dogmatic slumber'. The fact that Kołakowski recognized that philosophic issues were the ones that related to our moral attitude forced him finally to abandon Marxism. For – as it has been said in few works before – choosing Marxism is not an intellectual but a moral act.

Closure

The trouble of writing about Kołakowski's method of philosophizing is that it is inconsistent. It is based on disagreement and its motive is to present two options, both disappointing but for various reasons. Moreover, contrary to Aristotle's golden mean, there is no synthetic variant for them (Kołakowski, 1984, p. 7). However, as I tried to show, there are some currents that invariably describe Kołakowski's philosophy. They sure do take general form, but on the other hand, taking into account the vicissitudes of his thought, finding them should not be adjudged as irrelevant. After all, in some part, Kołakowski never fully rejected some strictly Marxist convictions: that human thought was continually modified and this process would never cease (moreover, all counter interventions were blameworthy), that philosophy demanded not only theorizing but also influencing moral attitude, that thinkers not only should describe reality, they were also obliged to reject all the falsehood present in the world, and to bare all kinds of fallacy. The change of the ways these ideas have been clarified by Kołakowski is determined, as a matter of fact, by moral sensitiveness. For as he pointed out in *Education to Hatred, Education to Dignity*: 'Evil must be part of the world, but woe to him who bears it' (Kołakowski, 1990, p. 257).

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ABSTRACT

MARXIST TRAIT OF REVISIONISM: LESZEK KOŁAKOWSKI'S CONSISTENT TRANSITION TO INCONSISTENT PHILOSOPHY

In the article the author describes theoretical reasons that stood behind Kołakowski's transition from being an orthodox Marxist to become an actual leader of the Polish revisionist movement. His intention is to concentrate on those aspects of Kołakowski's thought that have not changed, apart from any biographical and psychological reasons. (1) First of those features is Kołakowski's inability of completeness, the anti-code disposition. (2) The second trait is the moral attitude, an intention to influence on people's morality by convincing them that social and internal (necessarily bound with social) changes are desirable; that an existential calm demolishes morality. (3) Third feature concerns the fact that Kołakowski did not attempt to create his own philosophy, he was rather a historian of ideas, a skeptic, and a critic.

KEYWORDS: Kołakowski, revisionism, Marxism, involvement

MARKSISTOWSKIE CECHY REWIZJONIZMU: LESZKA KOŁAKOWSKIEGO SPÓJNE PRZEJŚCIE DO NIESPÓJNEJ FILOZOFII

W artykule zestawione zostają dwa pierwsze etapy twórczości Leszka Kołakowskiego: marksistowski oraz rewizjonistyczny. Wychodząc naprzeciw pracom, które dotychczas poruszały tę problematykę, autor skupia się na tych przekonaniach polskiego myśliciela, które pozostały niezmiennie dla każdego z obu okresów, więcej nawet – które wydały się leżeć u podstaw porzucenia przezeń marksistowskiej dogmatyki. Są to kolejno: (1) systemowa niezakończoność filozofii, jej antykodeksowe nastawienie; (2) potrzeba zaangażowania, związana z pomysłem, że do podstawowych zadań filozofii należy wpływanie na postawy moralne oraz ich odpowiednie kształtowanie; (3) antytetyczność podejścia Kołakowskiego, znajdująca istotny wyraz w przyjmowaniu pozycji błazna, a także konsekwentne nastawienie na negację zastanych propozycji światopoglądowych (tak tradycyjnych jak współczesnych polskiemu myślicielowi).

SŁOWA KLUCZOWE: Kołakowski, rewizjonizm, marksizm, zaangażowanie

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Marxist Trait of Revisionism: Leszek Kołakowski's Consistent Transition to Inconsistent Philosophy

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