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## Civilization Without Evil in Leszek Kołakowski's Works

**Abstract:** Leszek Kołakowski had a keen interest in the phenomenon of evil, and many of his works address this topic. Kołakowski made attempts to explore the origin of evil, human experiences of evil, changes in beliefs about evil in European consciousness throughout the ages, and he commented on the proposition that the world should be defined as free of evil. In his works, the phenomenon of evil was examined through the lens of two contextual perspectives: *episteme* and *sacrum*. This article explores the ways in which contemporary readers of Kołakowski's works approach the problem of evil from these two perspectives. The paper discusses Kołakowski's attempts to analyze the process of eliminating the traditional divide between good and evil and the rejection of Reason, Truth and Virtue in the Platonic and Aristotelean sense.

**Keywords:** Leszek Kołakowski, evil, ontological evil, experience of evil, *episteme*, *sacrum*

*Evil is a point of view.*

Anne Rice

*The belief in a supernatural source of evil is not necessary;  
men alone are quite capable of every wickedness.*

Joseph Conrad

*It's cold in the streets, and demons are dancing.  
It's cold in the streets, and demons dance samba.*

Bedoes & Kubi

Leszek Kołakowski had a keen interest in the phenomenon of evil, and many of his works address this topic. Kołakowski made attempts to explore the origin of evil, human experiences of evil, changes in beliefs about evil in European consciousness throughout the ages, and he commented on the proposition that the world should be defined as free of evil. In his work, the phenomenon of evil was examined in two contextual perspectives: *episteme* and *sacrum*. This article explores the ways in which contemporary readers of Kołakowski's works approach the problem of evil from these two perspectives.

"People who strongly believe [...] that the world is governed by a virtuous moral order and that goodness is the ultimate purpose of creation cannot escape ugliness, injustice, or suffering, but they find it easier to cope with adversity and find meaning in life regardless of their circumstances".<sup>1</sup> Leszek Kołakowski was fully aware that this statement is not a scientific hypothesis, but he posited that this belief stems from experience and is as important as theories that are formulated according to scientific rigor. Human experiences that lead us to see goodness instead of evil, happiness instead of suffering, or justice instead of injustice indicate that our point of view significantly impacts the quality of our lives and our attitudes towards life. Kołakowski argues that people who surround themselves in positivity tend to live happier lives. In his opinion, this approach enables man to enter the divine realm of a good, beautiful, and just world that has been described by both philosophers and theologians. This world is not cognitively accessible to everyone, but we all

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<sup>1</sup> Habermas, Rorty, Kołakowski, *Stan filozofii współczesnej*, transl. Józef Niżnik (Warszawa: IFiS PAN, 1996), 97.

eagerly listen to mystics and accept *a priori* judgements which confirm the existence of a moral order that serves a Higher Good.

Obviously, evil is a part of human experience, and together with good, it is an inseparable part of reality. However, evil is not a propitious partner for good. Evil makes constant attempts to deceive, ridicule, and outwit its companion; it wants us live in a world of injustice, pain, and suffering, and it commands us to commit the most atrocious acts that will corrupt our nature. Yet Kołakowski posits that the acceptance of a moral order that acknowledges the opposition between good and evil has profound value because we are able to live better lives by overcoming evil and following the path of virtue. However, the modern world relies largely on the ideology of non-believers who shun the existence of a moral order which leads mankind to the ultimate Good. Relativistic trends advocating for freedom from the traditional distinction between good and evil, truth and falsehood, are beginning to dominate over absolutist principles. Kołakowski examines the process of eliminating the traditional divide between good evil and the rejection of Reason, Truth, and Virtue in the Platonic and Aristotelean sense. For Kołakowski, this process is also a history of rejecting the concept of evil.

This article analyzes the key moments in this history as told by Kołakowski. The rejection of evil will be discussed through the lens of two contextual perspectives: *episteme* (knowledge) and *sacrum* (divine).

## Decline of evil. Epistemological perspective

In the contemporary world, a strong conflict exists between relativistic and absolutist approaches to the epistemological status of human knowledge. According to Kołakowski, “a relativist rejects the immutable and absolute standard of rationality”.<sup>2</sup> A relativist implicitly or explicitly accepts that human knowledge is accidental, shaped by biology, civilization and history, and ultimately represents an ordered product of human language. This approach rejects the existence of true knowledge in a classical, Aristotelean sense because even if true knowledge exists, it is not accessible to humans, and its existence cannot be

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<sup>2</sup> Ibidem, 98.

verified due to the lack of objective criteria. As noted by Kołakowski, absolutists argue that the theory postulating that all human knowledge is relative is as relative as any other theory, and even if it is true, its validity cannot be proven based on the same assumptions. He also stresses that in order to avoid this antinomy, “the proposition that an «epistemological» claim is transformed into a normative rule could offer a possible solution to the problem”.<sup>3</sup> Yet according to Kołakowski, this solution is ineffective because the very proposition is arbitrary and unreliable, and as such, it is therefore governed by relativistic criteria.

In the search for the essence of relativism, Kołakowski makes a special reference to the “anything goes” principle, which is the central slogan in Paul Feyerabend’s concept of methodological anarchism. “Anything goes” implies that restrictive conditions may be also imposed on new theories; therefore, the reverse statement – “not everything goes” – is also permissible. Kołakowski also discusses Karl Popper’s version of relativism which is devoid of permissiveness and avoids self-contradiction because it makes a reference to empirical hypotheses without attempting to become an empirical hypothesis. However, “if we assume that self-contradictory explanations of the same empirical evidence can never be fully eliminated, it is possible that our knowledge, accumulated in empirical hypotheses and laws, is and will always be composed exclusively of false statements”.<sup>4</sup> According to Kołakowski, Popper’s distinction between truth and falsehood merely supports the identification of false statements because truth can never be discovered, and although “general rules concerning admissibility or acceptability can be created, that which is acceptable can never be distinguished from that which is true”.<sup>5</sup>

There is no place for absolute truth in the contemporary world. Absolute truths were ousted by the relativistic concepts of the European civilization which “gradually eliminated the belief in the invariably important standards of intellectual work, the regulatory role of the *episteme*, and the utility of truth”.<sup>6</sup> According to Kołakowski, the decline of absolute values, which is manifested

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<sup>3</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>4</sup> Ibidem, 99.

<sup>5</sup> Ibidem. Kołakowski presents his stance on Karl Popper’s ideas in: Leszek Kołakowski, “Samozatrucie otwartego społeczeństwa”, in: Leszek Kołakowski, *Cywilizacja na ławie oskarżonych* (Warszawa: Res Publica, 1990), 155.

<sup>6</sup> Habermas, Rorty, Kołakowski, *Stan filozofii współczesnej*, 99.

by the current predominance of relativistic and skeptical views, began already in the Renaissance with the work of Michel de Montaigne. Montaigne was skeptical of all types of knowledge, and he argued that the human mind is incapable of grasping the truth. His views evolved in an era which witnessed the decline of humanist principles based on science and reason.<sup>7</sup> The modern era began with a battle aiming to appease the conflict between traditional Christian wisdom and the advance of modern, scientific views on the world. The gradual decline of the idea of evil can be traced back to the beginning of the modern era which witnessed the collapse of scholastic demonology. This collapse was reflected in modern visions of the world. René Descartes, one of the first modern philosophers, deployed methodological skepticism to instill doubt in absolute beliefs, but his concept of evil was one-dimensional, and the concepts of the cosmos, purposeful design, and world order disappeared. Kołakowski remarks that “the advancement of modern science was possible only in a world that was deprived of a soul. Miracles, mysteries, divine and demonic interventions could no longer be accepted as the driving forces in human history”<sup>8</sup> According to Kołakowski, “the Enlightenment continued to stir doubt about man’s ability to seek the truth in the traditional sense”<sup>9</sup>

The Enlightenment embraced the notion that the human spirit is omnipotent and does not require divine intervention, and this conviction gave rise to subsequent attempts at negating ontological evil. Modern philosophers postulated that humans are autonomous beings in all areas of life, which led to the rejection of traditions and religious heritage. However, the fundamentals of knowledge in the sciences, arts, and philosophy had to be reconstructed to free the human mind from tradition and religion. Kołakowski observes that human activities came into mutual conflict in the absence of an absolute point of reference. In his opinion, these conflicts gave rise to evil in all areas of human activity, and evil became a permanent part of human existence.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Cf. Leszek Kołakowski, *Filozofia pozytywistyczna (od Hume’a do Koła Wiedeńskiego)* (Warszawa: PWN, 1966), 26–39.

<sup>8</sup> Leszek Kołakowski, “Cywilizacja na ławie oskarżonych”, in: Leszek Kołakowski, *Cywilizacja na ławie oskarżonych* (Warszawa: Res Publica, 1990), 204.

<sup>9</sup> Habermas, Rorty, Kołakowski, *Stan filozofii współczesnej*, 100.

<sup>10</sup> Leszek Kołakowski, “Polityka i diabeł”, in: Leszek Kołakowski, *Cywilizacja na ławie oskarżonych* (Warszawa: Res Publica, 1990), 271–276.

A discussion about the fall of Reason and the decline of the concept of evil cannot be complete without a reference to David Hume's philosophical empiricism and skepticism. Kołakowski writes that Hume "reduced official knowledge, excluding tautologies, to individual perceptions that were immobilized in their singularity, whereas everything else was reduced to pragmatic values".<sup>11</sup> In an era that celebrated personal freedoms, the concept of evil had to be explained and defined through individual retrospection. Modern philosophical discourse promoted the idea that the world does not generate the distinction between good and evil, does not prescribe specific values, does not make any references, but becomes depleted on its own. As a result, evil was associated with irrationality.

A discussion about the decline of the concept of evil in the history of European culture should also make a reference to strongly relativistic interpretations of Darwinism, where knowledge was reduced to species-specific defense mechanisms, and reason was perceived solely as a tool that promotes adaptation to the environment. As a result, good and evil were interpreted only in the context of adaptive processes.

In Kołakowski's opinion, Friedrich Nietzsche's argument that humans can never discover the Platonic Truth and that there is no absolute truth, marked the end of the history of decline of Reason, Truth, and Virtue, and the decline of the concept of evil. According to Kołakowski, Nietzsche posits that we live in a world engulfed by mindless chaos, where "our philosophy, religious journeys, and even art are only veils of deception that enable us to hide from the real world (no matter that there is no Truth)".<sup>12</sup> He argues that the dead body of God, Truth and Virtue, and the decline of evil turned people to despair, which, as postulated by Arthur Schopenhauer, was only amplified by the realization that life is really a tragedy. However, Kołakowski notes that "civilizations are unable to survive in despair, or endure suffering for long".<sup>13</sup> These dramatic circumstances could only be overcome by justifying the fall of Reason. According to Kołakowski, such justification can be found in theories postulating that

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<sup>11</sup> Habermas, Rorty, Kołakowski, *Stan filozofii współczesnej*, 100. Cf. Leszek Kołakowski, *Filozofia pozytywistyczna*, 39.

<sup>12</sup> Ibidem, 102.

<sup>13</sup> Ibidem, 103.

truth and virtue independent of facts are only a mirage, a mirage that keeps on returning, but is nothing more than a deception. Absolute evil was thus classified as that which is irrational.

It appears that relativistic trends satisfied the human need to extricate reason from the delusional belief that knowledge would provide us with adequate tools to eliminate components that disrupt our peace of mind, and choose only those that make life bearable. By delineating the criteria for the acceptability of knowledge, reason was regarded as sufficient to maintain a sense of comfort. Above all, “nonsensical dilemmas conceived by delusional minds had to be rejected”.<sup>14</sup> The continued presence of evil in human experience was one of such dilemmas. The decline of the absolute unity of knowledge and the rise of relativism, subjectivism, plurality, and diversity were the hallmarks of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, a century that was expected to be free from real evil.

According to Kołakowski, “we are tempted to believe that the rapid acceleration of mobility, both spatial and social, was a particularly strong cultural factor that has led to the decline of moral standards”.<sup>15</sup> The organization of rural space guaranteed safety and stability, and the trust vested in tradition shaped norms and the belief in a higher purpose and the order of things. Kołakowski argues that “uprooting” is a hallmark of modern life, and that it encourages the formation of new mental habits that are free of the concept of rationality. This transition led to the loss of spiritual safety, but it did not eliminate the human need for stability or the desire to see the world the way it really is. In Kołakowski's opinion, these factors explain the spread of religious fanaticism, local ideologies, and addictions which generate a sense of stability, comprehension, and order, even if it is only for a brief moment.

As regards evil, “revolutions and counter-revolutions induced constant changes in devil's battalion which became overwhelmed and disoriented in the face of the information overload [...]. This poor creature must have breathed its last in an era of television, radio, telecommunications, and strong magnetic fields”.<sup>16</sup> Therefore, the devil was ridiculed, and ontological evil disappeared

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<sup>14</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>15</sup> Ibidem, 105.

<sup>16</sup> Gerald Messadié, *Diabeł – historia powszechna*, transl. Krystyna Szeżyńska-Mackowiak (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Da Capo, 1993), 441.

from human thought as the secular mind grew more independent and broke the magic spell in Max Weber's idea of a disenchanted world.

### Evil in a world without the *sacrum*

According to Kołakowski, "the negation of «absolute values» in the name of both rationalist principles and the general spirit of openness undermines our ability to distinguish between good and evil under the pretext that «we are not perfect either»; it stretches tolerance to fanaticism, favors the victory of intolerance, discourages the fight against evil, and encourages us to transform our imperfections into savagery".<sup>17</sup> The absence of absolute values implies that an omnipotent lawmaker is no longer needed. In the past, God was the ultimate creator of a divine order and a system of values, rules of thinking, and laws governing the natural world, both for believers and non-believers. Today, such a God no longer exists, and the hierarchy which prescribed man's place in the divine order was also eliminated. Kołakowski emphasizes that "a world in which man was left to his own devices, a world where man became the ultimate judge in matters of good and evil, and was liberated from the shackles of divine oppression in hope of regaining lost dignity, became a world of unending apprehension and despair".<sup>18</sup> Kołakowski refers to the absence of God as "an open wound in the European spirit". The wound is open because man was unable to replace God, and the resulting space is still vacant. "All that is left is a gaping hole. We still pray to that hole, to that Nothingness. But nobody responds. We are furious and surprised".<sup>19</sup> Science was expected to fill this emptiness. However, science became increasingly specialized and abstract, and it only added to the perceived lack of order and harmony. Evil is perpetually present in the human experience, but it has no bearing on the belief or the lack of belief in God. According to Kołakowski, the way in which people perceive evil is determined by the absence or presence of faith, and this

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<sup>17</sup> Leszek Kołakowski, "Bałwochwalstwo polityki", in: Leszek Kołakowski, *Cywilizacja na ławie oskarżonych* (Warszawa: Res Publica, 1990), 247.

<sup>18</sup> Leszek Kołakowski, "Troska o Boga w pozornie bezbożnej epoce", in: Leszek Kołakowski, *Nasza wesoła apokalipsa. Wybór najważniejszych esejów* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Znak, 2010), 297.

<sup>19</sup> Ibidem, 306.



perception enhances or weakens both belief and disbelief. However, a world without God is a source of anxiety for believers and unbelievers alike. It turns out that God cannot be forgotten and is present even if rejected.<sup>20</sup>

In Kołakowski's opinion, human lives and culture were imbued with the divine (*sacrum*) in that "all important divisions, all types of activities carried additional meaning, and that meaning could not be justified through direct empiricism. Death and birth, marriage, gender differences, differences between generations and epochs, work and art, war and peace, profession and destiny all carried a divine meaning. Regardless of its origin, the divine was a source of symbols that were used not only to identify various phenomena, but also to attach special meanings to these phenomena and arrange them in a hierarchy that could not be perceived through the senses. Divine symbols imbued all forms of social life with that which is inexpressible".<sup>21</sup> The divine order stabilized social structures and ensured their survival. Additional meanings were assimilated through the authority of tradition. The divine order was also responsible for the secular order, and "when divine meanings were removed from culture, all meaning was lost, *tout court*".<sup>22</sup> Kołakowski also emphasizes that by making the distinction between the sacred and the profane, we are negating the autonomy of the profane order which appears as insufficient, imperfect, and defective in this relationship. The rejection of the sacred prevents the profane from improving and developing because the limits of improvement and development were established by the *sacrum*. In this context, Kołakowski sees two important consequences of rejecting the sacred. Firstly, it encourages man to eliminate boundaries that define humanity. The loss of the distinction between the sacred and the profane popularized one of the most dangerous illusions of mankind, namely that the human life can be modified without a limit, and that postmodern societies are flexible enough to adapt these modifications. Secondly, the rejection of the sacred is an attempt to discredit evil which can be identified only through the *sacrum*. If we assume that evil is accidental, we accept the hypothesis that evil does not exist in the ontological sense;

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<sup>20</sup> Carl G. Jung argued that God is always resurrected in mythological archetypes. Cf. *ibidem*, 307–308.

<sup>21</sup> Leszek Kołakowski, "Odwet *sacrum* w kulturze świeckiej", in: Leszek Kołakowski, *Cywilizacja na ławie oskarżonych* (Warszawa: Res Publica, 1990), 146–147.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibidem*, 151.

therefore, the human need for meaning, which had been previously regarded as predetermined and essential, simply disappears. A question that arises is how can any meaning be decreed? Kołakowski claims that we have to turn to natural human instincts: we either acknowledge that man is inherently good, or we are confronted with man the way he was before the advent of culture – an untamed animal. However, culture is completely destroyed in both cases. Therefore, we are forced to devise new methods for repairing society without knowing the price. Kołakowski underlines that “the sacred order also determines our sensitivity to evil, and it is the only system of reference that enables us to consider the price we will ultimately have to pay”.<sup>23</sup>

The decline of the *sacrum* broke cultural taboos which, according to Kołakowski, are sacred and cannot be replaced by or expressed through other means of communication, and are *sui generis* both for those who experience the *sacrum*, as well as in reality.<sup>24</sup> Kołakowski’s main argument stems from the conviction that cultural taboos are rooted in every moral system and constitute the core of religious life. Taboos “create an essential bond between the cult of eternal reality and the recognition of good and evil”.<sup>25</sup> According to Kołakowski, both elements – religious cult and the knowledge of good and evil – cannot survive in separation because they can only exist in tandem as live manifestations of taboos. Even if taboos had been initially construed as biological inhibitions, they evolved into divine commands over time. The force of instinct was repressed by culture, and culture became a set of taboos.

In a secular world free of cultural taboos, human actions came into even greater conflict because man still actively participates in the battle between good and evil, remains immersed in that conflict, but is unable to find solace in moral norms or religious cults. Deprived of divine light, humankind began to associate good and evil with pleasure and pain, whereas suffering and death were recognized as natural facts that should be avoided. However, the gradual disappearance of the discourse on evil did not eliminate evil from human experience. Kołakowski rightly notes that “the root of evil is firmly planted in

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<sup>23</sup> Ibidem, 153.

<sup>24</sup> Leszek Kołakowski, “Jeśli Boga nie ma...”, transl. Tadeusz Baszniak, Maciej Panufnik, in: Leszek Kołakowski, *Jeśli Boga nie ma... Horror metaphysicus* (Poznań: Zysk i S-ka, 1999), 162.

<sup>25</sup> Ibidem, 161.

mankind, and we do not have the energy to weed it out from our existence. However, humans also possess a seed of goodness that can be nourished”.<sup>26</sup> Kołakowski focuses on this ray of light and quotes Paul the Apostle who remarked that “it is necessary that offenses will come, but woe to the man by whom the offences will come”.<sup>27</sup> Apparently, the call to do good is not sufficient when man is left to his own devices.

Suffering still permeates human existence, and it does not seem to have abated throughout the centuries. The postulate of omnipotent human reason, one of the central tenets of Enlightenment thinkers, did not supply tools for quantifying happiness and suffering; therefore, “man was deprived of the ability to distinguish between «good» and «bad» taboos, and the will to encourage the former and eradicate the latter. By abolishing one taboo on account of its «irrational» nature, we are initiating a «domino effect» that kills other taboos”.<sup>28</sup> The world has accelerated, and according to Kołakowski, the rapid pace of change has “annihilated the *sacrum*, [...] and the universe cannot reveal its hidden meaning to humans. We live in Cartesian space, and my village is no longer the center of the universe”.<sup>29</sup> At present, the distinction between good and evil is made based on utilitarian criteria, where evil is a technical error that can be easily rectified, but human experience dictates that evil cannot be easily repaired or eradicated from our lives.<sup>30</sup>

### Some remarks on the necessity of evil

In Kołakowski's opinion, non-relative, non-historic, and non-inherited (biologically) cultural constants are essential for preserving cultural reproduction. Although “human history is a *totum* that remains beyond human perception, we rely on cultural constants to define human history instead of

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<sup>26</sup> Leszek Kołakowski, “Ludzie są dobrzy”, in: Leszek Kołakowski, *Czy Pan Bóg jest szczęśliwy i inne pytania* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Znak, 2009), 240.

<sup>27</sup> Ibidem, 245.

<sup>28</sup> Kołakowski, “Cywilizacja na ławie oskarżonych”, 212.

<sup>29</sup> Leszek Kołakowski, “Nasza wesoła apokalipsa”, in: Leszek Kołakowski, *Nasza wesoła apokalipsa. Wybór najważniejszych esejów* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Znak, 2010), 345–346.

<sup>30</sup> Kołakowski, “Bałwochwalstwo polityki”, 255–256.

deriving that concept from the existing knowledge”.<sup>31</sup> A belief in cultural constants encourages deliberations on man’s actual involvement in the *sacrum*. This theory cannot be proven empirically, but according to Kołakowski, humanity that is deprived of such a belief would not be able to survive, whereas faith itself, if perceived solely as useful fiction, would be powerless. Faith has to embody man’s actual attitude to that which is immutable. The fact that cultural constants are remembered indicates that they are embedded in the *logos*, and although they are not accessible in their pure form, they can be discovered in historical and relative forms.

Free will (*liberum arbitrium*), namely the human capacity to choose between good and evil, is one of such cultural constants. Therefore, freedom is the source of knowledge about moral norms. Kołakowski relates the human capacity to choose between good and evil with the fact that “this distinction involves the ability to juxtapose elements that are beneficial or harmful, pleasant or offensive, permissible or punishable by law”.<sup>32</sup> The ability to distinguish between opposing categories is not purely intellectual, and it stems from individual sensitivity to feelings of guilt. Kołakowski makes a reference to Sigmund Freud who argued that guilt is a fundamental part of human nature and that feelings of guilt are the building blocks of human culture. Obviously, this concept can be traced back to the Bible, where man emerged as an individual being only after he had rebelled against God and experienced remorse. Kołakowski posits the presence of a correlation between experiences of guilt and experiences of the *sacrum*. Sacrilege breeds guilt, and guilt is a reminder that the *sacrum* has been violated. Feelings of guilt can be thus interpreted as man’s “unanimous attachment to invisible perception, the sacral dimension of secular objects, quality and events, namely religious traditions”.<sup>33</sup>

The rational concepts formulated by Enlightenment thinkers led to the downfall of the *sacrum*, and Kołakowski finds solace as signs of religious revival and the return of the sacred.<sup>34</sup> The *sacrum* is the cure for all evil, and it can

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<sup>31</sup> Leszek Kołakowski, “Reprodukcja kulturalna i zapomnienie”, in: Leszek Kołakowski, *Czy diabeł może być zbawiony i 27 innych kazań* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Znak, 2012), 108.

<sup>32</sup> Ibidem, 111.

<sup>33</sup> Ibidem, 112.

<sup>34</sup> Leszek Kołakowski, “Iluzje demitologizacji”, in: Leszek Kołakowski, *Cywilizacja na ławie oskarżonych* (Warszawa: Res Publica, 1990), 235.

explain and justify human anxiety and suffering. According to Kołakowski, “traditional human bonds which make social life possible, and which ensure that human existence is not regulated only by fear and greed, cannot survive without a system of taboos. Therefore, the belief in seemingly irrational taboos is more likely to benefit humanity than the eradication of all taboos. Rationality and reason undermine the very existence of taboos in human culture, but they also weaken its ability to survive. However, it is unlikely that taboos – barriers that are erected through instinct rather than conscious planning – can be saved, or at least saved selectively, with the use of rational methods. We can only rely on the uncertain hope that our survival instinct is strong enough to resist the extinction of taboos and that this resistance does not evolve into savagery”.<sup>35</sup>

Open and completely liberated societies do not abide by rational criteria of moral good and evil that are grounded in tradition, experience, and logic. Kołakowski argues that in such societies, “hate, envy, tribal egoism, racism, and aggression appear to be normal”.<sup>36</sup> Empirical knowledge can never teach people to choose between good and evil because this ability is not instilled through breeding, but it requires effort that is rooted in tradition.

## Conclusion

The question that remains to be answered is whether the modern world, devoid of a sense of permanence, lacking a higher purpose behind the facade of daily life, stripped of traditional values and the *sacrum*, has become a world free of evil? Are we all living in a new Arcadia?

In a postmodern world, science has not eliminated binary oppositions, and mankind still thinks in terms of extreme opposites: good-evil, true-false, nature-culture, finite-infinite, certainty-randomness. According to Kołakowski, Christianity was most effective in striking a balance between these opposites by “preserving mistrust in the physical world, not by habitually condemning the world as an incurable source of evil, but by regarding it as an enemy that

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<sup>35</sup> Kołakowski, “Cywilizacja na ławie oskarżonych”, 213.

<sup>36</sup> Kołakowski, “Samozatrucie otwartego społeczeństwa”, 171.

can be overpowered”.<sup>37</sup> In his opinion, despite political and social changes, European culture is still a Christian culture that expresses our shared spiritual heritage.<sup>38</sup> Therefore, questions concerning evil and its meaning should be addressed to Christianity. However, all Christian answers would focus on God who created the world with all the evil. In turn, the postulate that evil is simply the absence of good is “a mere deduction from the belief in a single Creator who, in addition to being the one and only God, is also infinitely good. This is merely a deduction, rather than a postulate that can be backed by experience”.<sup>39</sup> Experience dictates that God (if He exists) is not responsible for all evil in the world. There is no doubt that all humans harbor some evil that cannot be eradicated, and that the misery of the human condition features elements that can never be healed. However, humans do not know which types of evil can be minimized or overcome, and which they have to live with. Kołakowski describes two solutions to becoming reconciled with the drama of human existence. “We can take comfort in the thought that civilizations generally overcome their problems by mobilizing self-repair mechanisms or producing antibodies that fight the dangerous effects of their own development”, but this solution cannot be taken for granted.<sup>40</sup> We can also assume that our purpose is to “fight against the sources of suffering, but we can never be certain that the tree of progress will bear good fruit”.<sup>41</sup> This observation is consistent with Nikolas Berdyaev’s postulate that a return to early Christianity is needed to revive the imagination and restore noumenal reality. In Kołakowski’s opinion, such a return is impossible because the initial order cannot be restored and changes cannot be reversed. According to Kołakowski, we live in the Post-Enlightenment world. “The Enlightenment turned against itself, and Reason was lost due to the triumphant victory of Reason over the Irrationality of archaic

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<sup>37</sup> Leszek Kołakowski, “Szukanie barbarzyńcy”, in: Leszek Kołakowski, *Czy diabeł może być zbawiony i 27 innych kazań* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Znak, 2012), 29.

<sup>38</sup> Leszek Kołakowski, “Czy diabeł może być zbawiony?”, in: Leszek Kołakowski, *Czy diabeł może być zbawiony i 27 innych kazań* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Znak, 2012), 216.

<sup>39</sup> Leszek Kołakowski, “Leibniz i Hiob. Metafizyka zła i doświadczenia zła”, in: Leszek Kołakowski, *Czy Pan Bóg jest szczęśliwy i inne pytania* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Znak, 2009), 9.

<sup>40</sup> Kołakowski, “Cywilizacja na ławie oskarżonych”, 209.

<sup>41</sup> Kołakowski, “Czy diabeł może być zbawiony?”, 217.

mentality".<sup>42</sup> However, Kołakowski notes that the rejection of relativism will not contribute to knowledge about truth and virtue, and that the criteria for defining these concepts cannot be established because "the search for knowledge does not have a zero point, and an unpolluted source of certainty, a certainty that is true, unconditional and unquestionable, does not exist".<sup>43</sup> Meanwhile, humanity is afflicted with evil, a disease for which there is no cure.

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<sup>42</sup> Habermas, Rorty, Kołakowski, *Stan filozofii współczesnej*, 108.

<sup>43</sup> Ibidem, 99.

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