

## UTOPIAN THINKING: A DISCOURSE ON THE CULTURE OF LESZEK KOŁAKOWSKI AND ZYGMUNT BAUMAN

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### ABSTRACT

The main thesis of this article is that the utopian thinking of Bauman and Kołakowski represents a natural “hermeneutic orientation” for human beings. This, in turn, means that the human race almost instinctively attempts to discover the sense of each and every thing which it comes to experience. The concepts of culture found in Bauman and Kołakowski are anchored in the hermeneutic worldview – a perspective which assumes that there is a sense and meaning existing beyond human intentions. What connects these two Polish philosophers in their ponderings on European culture is a nonorthodox model of structuralism rooted in the works of Claude Lévi-Strauss.

KEYWORDS: Zygmunt Bauman, Leszek Kołakowski, thinking-acting, rationality, hermeneutics, myth, structuralism

### 1. INTRODUCTION

The contributions of Zygmunt Bauman and of Leszek Kołakowski are rooted in utopian thinking. On the one hand, in the case of the author of *Liquid Modernity*, Bauman’s sociological engagement entails indications of problems emerging at the level of communal life; he encourages us to undertake endeavors whose aim it is to resolve these situations with hopes for a positive outcome of such efforts. On the other hand, the philosophical engagement of the author of *The Presence of Myth* is rooted in a belief in evil that is inherent in people along with their humanity. As Jan Tokarski (2016: 326) wrote, “In the eyes of Kołakowski, in all that is good, lying somewhere deep inside

is some kind of contradiction or antinomy. Freedom, justice, or beauty – all of these are heterogeneous concepts; upon deeper inspection they shatter into incongruent elements. Their unity can be postulated, but cannot be achieved in reality.” It is the antinomy of the values that constitutes the mechanism of the dynamics of European culture. The solitary power of goodness lies in the fact that the “...Absolute can never be forgotten. And the fact that we cannot forget about God means that He is present even in our rejection of him” (Kołakowski, 2009: 69-70). According to Kołakowski (1989: 135), “The uncertainty of the projects and the impermanence of the conquests turn out to be a condition of a creative survival of culture. The story of culture is an epic splendid through its fragility.” Here it is evident that, in their thinking about culture, Kołakowski’s cornerstone was the *Absolute*, whereas Bauman’s was *praxis*.

As observed by Dariusz Brzeziński (2017: 20), “Bauman associated the axiological foundation of Marxist thought – then as well as in subsequent years of his philosophizing – with the undertaking of actions aimed at the elimination of social injustice, fetishistic materialism, and any and all forms of usurpation of human subjectivity.” Zygmunt Bauman owed this correlation to Antonio Gramsci (1961) who was deeply convinced of the primal role of culture in the introduction of social changes. In describing the philosophy of practice, Bauman (1963: 28-29) wrote that, “there is but one way it can itself become the worldview of the majority: by overcoming ‘colloquial reason’, disclosing the actual structure of the social process, and leading to a mass consciousness of the dialectical relationship between human action and the history of its social world.”

The utopian thinking of both Bauman and Kołakowski constitutes a human being’s natural, hermeneutical orientation – meaning that the human race (almost instinctively) tries to extract sense out of everything that it happens to experience. The concepts of culture of these two social scientists are thus anchored in the hermeneutic worldview, that is, one which assumes a meaning beyond human intentions. With respect to Zygmunt Bauman, he (just like Giambattista Vico, the author of *The New Science*) is conscious of the fact that the ties that bind citizens and create a community out of a group of disparate individuals are shared emotions experienced together. Therefore transcendence and transgression constitute a modality of being in the world for humans. With respect to Leszek Kołakowski (1989: 42), “The Myth of Reason cleanses us of despair; it is a *ratio* against contingency but cannot itself have reason. Yet it has behind it a right which is derived with equal arbitrariness from two options: the option for myth and the option against.” Yet, “in the myth of Exile we admit that evil is within us” (Kołakowski, 1982). Moreover, “history cannot be understood as a significant structure if we do not assume a supra-historical essence embodied in its course”

(Kołakowski, 1967: 236).

In his understanding of general history, Kołakowski is also indebted to Vico. After all, the fundamental message of the latter's synthesis of sacred and secular histories is a conviction that the historical process is not only a human creation, but a mirror in which the human being can view his reflection. As Vico (1948: para 349) noticed, "For the first indubitable principle above posited is that this world of nations has certainly been made by men, and its guise must therefore be found within the modifications of our own human mind. And history cannot be more certain than when he who creates the things also describes them." Nevertheless, this clearly expressed idea is quickly countered by a contradictory one – the view that the course of history is directed by divine forces. "The decisive sort of proof in our Science is therefore this that, once these orders were established by divine providence, the course of the affairs of the nations had to be, must now be and will have to be such as our Science" (Vico, 1948: para 348).

Analyzing history, Giambattista Vico examines it, on the one hand, as a consequence of human activities, and, on the other hand, as a set of regularities that are invariant to those activities. Emerging from his *The New Science* is an antonymous vision of man as both a subject and object of history perceived as the initiator of events fully subordinated by the will of the highest divinity. The limited aims and goals of the human manifest themselves herein as little more than a means for the more extensive purposes of Providence. Hence nations as a subject of secular history are simultaneously an object of sacred history – inalterably remaining in the field of influence of sacrum's patterns.

Essentially, the theoretical framework of *The New Science* can be condensed into a triad: 1) mainstream history as a human product (thesis); 2) the course of history as conducted by God (antithesis); and 3) history as the product of people in the sense of agency, yet the work of the Lord in the teleological sense (synthesis). Vico discerned the discrepancy between the intentions of individuals and the results of their actions, between what people truly desire to achieve and what they actually do. This fact Vico explained by divine intervention; Kołakowski, in his later works, accepted this as the Absolute (moving from a philosopher in a jester's mask to one wearing that of a priest). The underlying proposition found in Giambattista Vico's philosophy of history is rationalism, providence, and the negation of a teleological subjectivity of humankind.

## 2. THINKING AND ACTING

Thinking has been recognized in philosophy as a systemic principle; further,

thinking and acting are the basic forms for the realization of humanity. Thus, with regards to the universal principles for the functioning of the human mind, the fundamental relationship is the one between thinking and acting which Florian Znaniecki (1922: 105) formulated as “every action is a thought” and “each thought is an action.” After all, action only occurs “wherever the perfect course is the trigger for and organizer of real facts” (Znaniecki 1922: 104). All this entails the effects of a thinking process which causes physical consequences, that is, a model act which evokes real results in the outside world, experientially accessible by other subjects.

Emerging from this backdrop is the concept of rationality. In postmythical and postmodern times, it is knowledge and research which have taken on the role of the highest principle steering action. A marked exemplification of this thesis is scientism understood as a philosophical faith in erudition itself. This is a normative position which regulates the ways in which such terms as “knowledge” or “cognition” are used. According to Leszek Kołakowski, this is one of many forms of the alienation of reason. Hence rationality is not a fact, but rather a combination of certain aspirations which are subordinated in our thinking, speaking, learning, and acting. Such a commingling of aims is the effect of reason’s reflexivity which facilitates a rational transgression of the standards of rationality.

As Herbert Schnädelbach (1998) illustrates in one of his essays, reason can be understood as either subjective or objective. Furthermore, subjective reason can encompass several varieties from the operative (leading from evidence to conclusions) and the intellectual (an intuitive overview) to the theoretical and practical (assuming a holistic view of reason as auto-reflexively critical). Still, these differentiations neither avert the issue of the historical fortuitousness of reason, nor its linguistic nature.

There remain, too, the insoluble issues surrounding objective reason which can be delineated as the sum of intelligibles (i.e., things which can be captured by the intellectual structure of the world). This type of reason was best depicted by Georg W. Hegel since the fundamental thesis of his philosophical system is the one which associates thought (the Absolute) with being. As Hegel (1977) asserts in the introduction to *Phenomenology of Spirit*, man is an agent of cognition: whereas being is thinking, so, too, being finds itself precisely through thinking. Clearly we are dealing with an association of thought and being which means that the latter must be identical with the former because the latter realizes the former’s laws. A being identified with thinking develops logically – and this is what comprises the mooring for Hegelian rationalism.

This rationalism is based upon a belief that the idea (reason) preceding the material world is that very world’s cornerstone. In other words, reason precedes nature (material being) and the physical world is born of an idea.

The creative force which draws matter from thought is reason. And if it is through reason that the material world is formed, then the principles guiding its development are comprehensible and logical. Therefore, there are no mysteries or secrets in the world – everything is rational and, thanks to all of this, human reason is palpable and cognizable. Naturally, there is an exception: all is cognizable but reason itself.

The author of *The Phenomenology of Spirit* did not overcome the skepticism of David Hume. We are unable to legitimize our way of learning because reason cannot justify itself. Tracing Hume's footsteps, reason must simply be assumed because there is no substitute for it. The crisis in rationality lies in the fact that a clear turn has been made towards something incompatible with reason, something irrational. This does not alter the fact that deconstructed reason continues to be the single legitimate means by which to learn and understand the world. What has led to the deconstruction of reason and rationality is language. As Hannah Arendt observed a long time ago, the masses do not long for rationality, but rather consistency. Yet the latter of these is a mechanism guaranteeing the effectivity of conspiracy constructs. Each reality is marked by a coincidentalness which the human being (in line with human nature) will attempt to organize and set in order. This is the root of a desire among the masses to escape into the fiction of order and reliability – in other words, an ideological creation of reality. Who speaks a language reigns over reality.

### 3. METAPHYSICAL HORROR

In the words of Leszek Kołakowski (1990: 17), “We can never escape the infernal circle of epistemology: whatever we say, even negatively, about knowledge implies a knowledge we boast of having discovered; the saying ‘I know that I know nothing’, taken literally, *is* self-contradictory” (1988:9). There is, therefore, no purely negative knowledge; any and all knowledge is positive. After all, as Hegel (1977) noted, negation is also a designation. Consequently, the act of doubting presumes a belief that *something* is real, even if the doubting subject does not know what that thing exactly is. When the existence of truth is rejected outright, then any and all disbelief becomes a moot point. Thus skepticism is as much a metaphysical as an anti-metaphysical stance in a sense similar to how positivism is simultaneously a philosophy and anti-philosophy (Kołakowski, 1966: 7).

It can be accepted that reason is the foundation for metaphysics as faith is the foundation for religion. After all, metaphysics – like religion, as Kołakowski taught in *The Presence of Myth* – is an answer to the deep, existential needs of human beings. It is a response to the desire for a life in an

orderly world whose genesis, sense, and destiny can be encapsulated and described somehow. Here metaphysics is a model for the experiencing of the fragility of human existence as well as proof that not everything can be known and so one has to believe in something. Reason and belief are in a dialectical relationship – a relationship made manifest in deconstructed expressions of the two sides (such as secularization or postmodernism).

It was Max Weber who wrote of how reason and rationality had deconstructed Christianity, and Leszek Kołakowski who subsequently described how language had deconstructed reason and rationality. One of the primary theses of Kołakowski's *Metaphysical Horror* can be synthesized as follows: there are not and cannot be any universally binding standards of rationality; there is no such thing as an epistemological legitimacy tout court. Truth and falsehood are derivatives – derived from an accepted set of rules and regulations which have themselves been culturally established. There is neither an absolute beginning of thinking, nor any absolute conceptual categories. We are incapable of transcending language which, in turn, cannot free itself of its roots embedded in the perception, imagination, and logic of cultural norms. In other words, the reality of objects is relativized down to a linguistic game, little more than putative schemes of perception shaping the cognitive organization of the world. A consequence is that no philosophy could overcome the paralyzing paradox of *self-transformation*.

In general, as Leszek Kołakowski (1990: 120-1) put it:

In making one of all possible languages operational and intelligible - and thus in making a metaphysical or epistemological standpoint credible - we never start from the beginning. The choice among all possible languages is made not by God but by civilizations. Philosophies voice the aspirations and the choices of civilizations; this does not mean that philosophers are passive channels or phonographic instruments which civilizations employ to express themselves (as Hegelians occasionally seem to believe). By making a civilization explicit, they help it to expand and assert itself, not unlike all of us, who by an effort of expression, open new and unexpected avenues of our own evolution (Kołakowski 1988:99).

In accord with the above-sketched position, there is a fundamental and bilateral relationship between, on the one hand, culture tout court and, on the other, its specific segment known as philosophy. Philosophy – a mental reality rooted in a culture – inevitably inherits that culture's *esprit* and basic structural characteristics. But that is not all, because philosophy (at least in part) pays off its debt (as it were) to culture by contributing to its expansion and intellectual affirmation. If so, then pluralism and the striking wealth of Western philosophical thought manifests itself as the structural reflection of pluralism and the internal complexity of that civilization. If so, then the re-

markably discursive and rationalistic nature of European philosophy stems from a culturally established trust in human cognitive capabilities and the power of reason writ large. And if so, then finally philosophy itself can constitute itself as an autonomous spirit only when culture breaks through its original preliterate-mythical state.

In this context Ernest Gellner's critique of postmodernism as a passing fad does astonish. The author of *Postmodernism, Reason and Religion* already dubbed as archaic the symmetrical situation popularized by the postmodernists in which all manner of discussion and exchange took place. As Gellner (1990: 57) wrote,

The world we actually inhabit is totally different. Some two millennia and a half ago, it did perhaps more or less resemble the world the relativist likes to paint (...). This means that a certain number of cultures emerged within which the relationship between the Transcendent and the Social had become rather more tense: the Transcendent liberated itself from at least the more obvious and visible dependence on the Social, claimed to sit in judgement on it, and assumed an authority going beyond the limits of any one community, polity or ethnic group.

Hence Gellner can be seen as advocating Karl Jaspers' *Axial Age* – the result of Old Testament monotheism and the Greek philosophy of ideal forms – and a position which views European culture as the synthesis of Judaism and Greek philosophy.

The multiplicity and non-translatability of languages comprises a constitutive trait of philosophy in general and European philosophy in particular. With respect to this problem, Kołakowski (1988: 111-112) commented that,

Philosophy is by definition a territory of the confusion of tongues, that is to say, where no agreement is attainable as to the criteria of validity (...). So far, the story of the disaster of Babel, at least in its ostensible sense, has been borne out: the confusion of tongues in philosophy is a punishment for the very act of inventing philosophy, or the revenge of mythology on the enlightenment for the latter's arrogant attempt to demolish the former.

One of the effects of the deconstruction of the mythological image of the world – a dismantling which Europe executed most consistently and fully – was a problematization and relativization of the concept of truth. Among other things, the development of Western philosophy gave rise to a broad array of equally legitimate languages which are not mutually or completely translatable. Naturally, this also led to a correspondingly impressive multiplicity of truths and falsehoods. It was in reaction to this that *Metaphysical Horror* came to be, along with the haunting specter of an infinite uncertain-

ty. Amidst this arose postmodernism. Western philosophy – thanks to similarities in structural characteristics – achieved a dynamics analogous to that of the advanced and progressive European culture. This, in turn, set in motion a process of constant self-criticism and self-questioning.

#### 4. MYTH AS A TRANSCENDENT ORDER

The essence of man's existential situation is delineated, according to Kołakowski, not by the fact that the human being is a sensitive and feeling entity, but rather by the fact that a person can become an object of oneself and can be one's own observer. In a word, a human not only knows that he or she is in the world, but also knows that he or she knows – or (to put it differently) he or she is conscious of being precisely a conscious entity. By the same token, our presence in the world has ceased to be so obvious a phenomenon, not requiring explanation. After all, it is impossible to identify a self-observing consciousness with a consciousness that is an integral component of nature.

The awareness of being (an inalienable attribute of humanity) entails a trespassing or transgression beyond the natural order of things. That is how it becomes something inexplicable: there is no way to explain this as a component of nature. But if it is not such a component, then what exactly is it? Man's situation – in order to be explicable – requires placement in some "higher" order, placement into some supra-empirical order. In other words, this situation of the human being requires a transcendental order which, in turn, can only be constituted mythically.

Kołakowski perceives the mythical worldview as a universal phenomenon and, as such, an indispensable and inerasable element in each and every culture. There is no way to escape myth, just as myth cannot be eradicated from collective life. Indeed, it is a symptom of the inalienable traits of the integral constitution of human consciousness as well as the references of that constitution to the world of nature. In this context Hegel's declaration can more easily be understood: concept has given birth to matter. Without awareness of the cognizant subject, the natural world would be nothingness because, considered all together, nature has no history.

Culture cleansed totally of myth is impossible to imagine. Were a forced demythologization to be consistently and consequently applied, then it would also annihilate as invalid not only the answers to queries transcending direct empirical data, but it would even preclude the posing of such questions. Philosophical criticism inevitably leads to the questioning of a dichotomy between consciousness and things, as well as to the invalidation of a differentiation between the act of perception and the object of perception

which must precede that act.

Yet that distinction – even if invalid – comprises the *sine qua non* condition for all thinking, both the scientific and the popular. Without it, the individual is capable neither of distinguishing him or herself as a reality different from the surrounding world, nor of constructing his or her own identity, nor of understanding him or herself as a component of the situation at hand. In a word, the “mythical” category of unconditional existence (i.e., not preconditioned by a subject’s consciousness) constitutes an immutable precondition for precisely that perception of the world which it is simultaneously deforming and falsifying. The absence of this specific category is unimaginable – that would mean a pure epistemological negativity. By the same token, this would entail a paralysis of any and all cognitive activity without which no culture is possible.

Myth is more than a premise of the epistemology and a condition for self-perception as a whole which can be extracted from its surroundings. It is also the foundation for the most rational and codified area of human intellectual activity – logic. It was Edmund Husserl who first countered the understanding of logic as an accidental science (that is, dependent upon concrete aspects of the workings of a human mind). Husserl saw logic as sets of rigorous norms, forecasting any and all real thinking. Thus logic is a system which speaks not of *how* people think, but rather how people *should* think so as to think correctly. According to Husserl, logic only makes sense if it comprises a categorical obligation: logic faces a formulated thought to which it must unconditionally submit. Therefore, it is a set of a priori rules which are transcendental vis-à-vis any factual argumentation. A Husserlian, transcendental consciousness is necessary in order to save the rationality of science and erudition. Such a consciousness thus comprises an integral element of the mythical one because the legitimacy of the evidence cannot be proven before it is accepted. As Leszek Kołakowski (1989: 41) put it,

Belief in Reason cannot have its grounds discovered by the application of Reason as such. Belief in Reason is a mythical option; it therefore lies beyond the scope of Reason. It is necessary for the self-constitution of humanity, as presence of Reason in the reasonless universe for humanity’s self-identification, for a radical self-knowledge that one is something other than a plasma with more variegated sensitivity.

The myth of reason writ large is, to put it differently, man’s disapprobation of (in this case, his own) intellectual contingency and of yet another fruitless attempt to anchor himself in a sense that is immune to relativization.

Endeavors to participate in a world organized by myth, endeavors to surpass oneself in a transcendental order manifests itself not only in science or

religion, but also in other spheres of cognitive activity. The mythical consciousness is, in the eyes of Kołakowski, universal although usually mystified. Therefore this consciousness is present in every grasping of the world as being equipped with values; this consciousness is also present in an understanding of history as a sensible structure.

## 5. A STRUCTURALISTIC MODEL

What connects Bauman and Kołakowski in their considerations of European culture is a conceptual model elaborated in the field of social anthropology, and, more importantly, comprising the crowning moment of several decades of development in this field. This involves a structuralistic model in an unorthodox version which is extrapolated from the writings of Claude Lévi-Strauss. Much could be said about this model, but, above all, it is the embodiment of relativism as well as openness and uncertainty. In this there is no finiteness. Leszek Kołakowski first presented this model in his *Religious Consciousness and the Church* of 1965 (560-561):

The sense of the phenomenon which we take as the structure's core can be enhanced endlessly by including new dependencies in the structure; we never have the right to say that this sense has been completely exhausted in some reconstruction. In this understanding, structure always leaves an opening. There is no universal code that would precursorially exclude or ban certain kinds of dependencies: there is not any important, a priori principle by which some type of relationship would be rendered useless in or actually prevent the understanding of a phenomenon. [...]. The reasonableness of a fact for knowledge remains in a state of chronic temporality, because every sense with which it is endowed – and reasonableness is not an immanent quality of fact, but rather its place in reconstructed wholes – is an open sense due to the possibility of changing the structure by incorporating new facts.

In turn, Zygmunt Bauman referred to this model in *Sketches from the Theory of Culture* which was ready in Polish in 1968, but ultimately not published for decades due to the unrest in Poland that year and Bauman's subsequent emigration. In this volume from the 1960s, Bauman treated culture as a mechanism for *the reduction of ambiguity*; this mechanism sets in motion an endless process thanks to which the cultural reality succumbs to permanent changes. Bauman situates his reading of Lévi-Strauss within the latter's belief that the task of the anthropologist is the cognition of "difference" as precisely a difference – part and parcel of an internal, "private" logic, unsullied by an obsessive thought arising in some alien civilization's rhetoric. Bauman dubs his predecessor a great revolutionist in human self-knowledge,

accurately pinpointing the socialization potential in human nature. He writes,

Thanks to language, abstract ideas, thinking, people can *mentally create the structure of the world* [emphasis mine] - without destroying the object that this structure is meant to reproduce. [...] Beyond the phenomenal sphere lie not so much individual or collective needs, as structures. Structure is the essence of culture. To understand culture is equivalent to understanding a shared structure behind all the specialized technological spheres of human activity. [...] anthropology is not the study of institutions, customs, but of the structure of human thought that is manifested in them. [...] the commonality of the human species is based in the finitude of the collection of meaningful signs, among which different cultural systems can select - always using, however, similar principles of construction, which allows for each structure to be examined as the transformation of another structure [...] (Bauman 2018: 24, 25).

In due course, Bauman claims that Lévi-Strauss' "ultimate fact" in the world of human matters is the construction of human thought – a way of building intellectual structures, replaying or projecting alternatives for human existence. Subsequent to this, Bauman puts forth a difficult question for structuralism: with regards to what reality does culture fulfill a function of meaning? Yet he answers his own question from the activistic and materialistic perspective: the function of culture depends upon the reduction of an indeterminacy in the world. In other words, the function depends upon the elimination of a large palette of potentialities as well as upon the display of specific choices as correct and obvious. After all, culture entails the transformation of that which is unforeseeable into that which is necessary.

Culture is therefore the creation of information – a process of extracting information from outside as well as inside human environs. It fulfills both a cognitive and controlling function simultaneously. Culture is a way of ordering and structuralizing all that surrounds the human individual; it is a way of correlating the system of individual behavior with the system of that individual's environment. The world becomes a language inasmuch as people learn to unearth the information found within phenomena. But here, too, the informative function of human action – just as with any informative function – is linked to reduction of a situation's inexactitude. The greater the sketchiness of a social situation, the greater must be the information load inherent in applicable human actions so as to facilitate a proper orientation. Humankind must constantly abide by a lack of clarity in the world, dealing with this by actively setting that world in order. And the best example of such managing and arranging is the technological revolution.

## 6. BY WAY OF A CONCLUSION: MYTH DECONSTRUCTED

“Sense” – which cannot be defined psychologically and is not tantamount to human experience – manifests itself as some sort of spiritual language. It manifests itself as a code of sorts distinguishing itself from the rest by its ontological autonomy and, consequently, constitutes a separate realm of being. Against this backdrop a question arises as to the genesis of that sense. Is this something that we create ourselves, equipping various sectors of reality with an objectivized surplus of spirit? Or is this something that can only be found in the world? Perhaps, however, it is both of these? As Kołakowski (1988: 117) claimed,

My guess is that in the perspective of hermeneutics the answer is: both. If so, the meaning is neither freely produced by us nor simply ready-made, embedded in nature or history, and awaiting a discoverer. It is rather that the meaning-generating Mind is being made actual in the very process of revealing itself to our mind, or that the meaning-endowed Being is ‘becoming what it is’ thanks to human understanding of what it is.

An alternative to the just described concept is a scientific image of the world which programmatically rejects teleological queries as illegitimate and superseding the competencies of reason. After all, reason declares that, “The alternative to this belief is a consistently scientific world-image which implies or explicitly states that ‘to be’ is pointless, that neither the universe nor life nor history have any purpose and that there is no meaning apart from human intentions.” (Kołakowski 1988: 142). From this perspective, scientism – a unique product of European culture – stands in fundamental contradiction to the nature of (self-aware) human existence which relentlessly seeks out the senses and meanings rooted in the universe. Leszek Kołakowski (1988:118-119) elucidates,

We shall never get rid of the temptation to perceive the universe as a secret script to which we stubbornly try to find the clue. And why, indeed, should we get rid of this temptation which proved to be the most fruitful source in all civilizations except our own (or, at least, its dominant trend)? And where does the supreme validity of the verdict which forbids us this search come from? Only from the fact that this civilization - ours - which to a large extent has got rid of this search proved immensely successful in some respects; but it has failed pathetically in many others.

Still, apart from the existentialistic argument just presented, there is yet another basis legitimizing the hermeneutic worldview. Hence Kołakowski (1988: 120) asks in the closing to *Metaphysical Horror*: “And is it not a

plausible suspicion that if ‘to be’ were pointless and the universe void of meaning, we would never have achieved not only the ability to imagine otherwise but even the ability to think precisely this: that ‘to be’ is indeed pointless and the universe void of meaning?”

Following this line of thinking, the weightiness of the hermeneutic perspective stems, too, from the fact that this perspective constitutes the *sine qua non* condition for scientism. In other words, this involves a cognitive construct whose negation gave rise to the scientific position in the first place. If so, then the opposition to hermeneutics and scientism resembles both the relationship between metaphysics and skepticism and reproduces the most basic structural traits of European culture tout court. Finally, in the context of these arguments, insupportable is Ernest Gellner’s (1992) observation that there exists an absolute (not relativized to any culture) procedure thanks to which scientific, scholarly theories of a non-absolute value arise. His stance constitutes methodological fundamentalism pure and simple.

The method noted above requires a transcendence which is the myth of Reason writ large. In turn, that myth of reason comprises the effect of man’s rejection of his intellectual fortuity – yet another attempt in vain to root oneself in an unrelativized sense of things. Accordingly, no performances are more privileged; we are condemned to suffer a metaphysical horror and a “nostalgic turn” (Boym 2001). We long for the past, or rather its mythologized depiction affecting our contemporary *imaginarium*. This is reflected in the way individuals think about the world, about their goals, and about the practices they execute. That wistful longing is a converse phenomenon with reference to the process of “liquidization” in our social reality (Bauman 2018).

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