

Zygmunt Bauman and the Question of the Intellectual in Postmodernity

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1.

Zygmunt Bauman is one of those few contemporary thinkers with whom it is worth while to think together about our postmodern condition; and that thinking together with him does not necessarily have to mean following his roads and accepting his conclusions, though - it may also mean thinking in a way which is parallel to his own thinking, one that sometimes crosses with it in some points of convergence, sometimes departs from it for various, often idiosyncratic and individual reasons. Although reading Bauman requires close attention, as his particular works are interrelated and mutually complementary, nevertheless the attention paid to them is amply rewarded.

For the perspective of his sociological hermeneutics (as he sometimes calls his thinking) is extremely productive for today's thinking of culture - both in itself, as well as confronted with proposals and suggestions of other postmodern critics and critics of postmodernity, especially (in a strong sense of the term) philosophical ones. A peculiar paradox becomes apparent, at least as far as I can see it precisely as a philosopher: Bauman's questions appeal stronger to a philosophical discourse of postmodernity than to a sociological one. There is a growing number of sociological volumes devoted to "intellectuals" of today, but none of them seems to compare in its intellectual horizons with diagnoses and suggestions of the author of *Legislators and Interpreters*. The controversy that for recently has been taking place in France and in the USA among

philosophers, finds in Bauman its most interesting supplement. Therefore, crossing traditional disciplinary boundaries, it is worth while to read him in the context of *philosophical* discussions, as it is precisely in these discussions that Bauman's voice - although indirect and rather from behind main currents of a philosophical discourse of today - is a voice that deserves the highest attention. And let the author of *Intimations of Postmodernity* forgive me the fact that I am trying hard here to associate him with what perhaps is not dearest to him, not closest to his thinking from his own perspective (i.e. with postmodernism and neopragmatism, to use these two vague terms). The point is, though - and let us provide it as legitimacy of a sort - that *habent sua fata libelli*. Books have their own fate, their fate depends on the direction we push them in (i.e. we - readers), depends on what books we will put them next to in a great library of humanity. Their fate depends on what we will manage to do with them, for what purpose we will be able to use them, what interests we will have while reading them and writing about them. Nietzsche wrote about it, Walter Benjamin did, finally Richard Rorty used that saying when he was asked what provides legitimacy for his reading of Donald Davidson on the one hand and Jacques Derrida on the other.¹ Davidson does not seem too sympathetic to Rorty's endeavours that reduce him to an intellectual shield in struggles of Rorty's neopragmatism with its opponents; Derrida until very recently has kept silence on the subject. But, anyway, great polemics are taking place all the time, what is more, they are highly interesting, there emerge groups of "defenders" of both philosophers against their Rortyan "pragmaticization" which take care of purity and undisturbed transmission of their masters' views...² Given a certain

¹ See Richard Rorty, "Réponse à Jacques Bouveresse" in a splendid volume *Lire Rorty. Le pragmatisme et ses conséquences* (Paris: L'eclat, 1992), p. 156, or the answer Rorty gave to F. Farrell's complaints from *Subjectivity, Realism and Postmodernism*: "... I do not think it matters whether Davidson would or would not be sympathetic to such an extrapolation. If you borrow somebody's idea for a different purpose, is it really necessary to clear this novel use with the originator of the idea?", a typescript, p. 1.

² See my *Rorty's Elective Affinities. The New Pragmatism and Postmodern Thought* (Poznan: A. Mickiewicz University Press, 1996). Let me provide only two examples of that: Frank Farrell, *Subjectivity, Realism and Postmodernism - the Recovery of the World* (Cambridge: CUP, 1994) the opening sentence: "... Richard Rorty, in his various writings, has given an unreliable account of recent philosophy. He gets certain figures wrong, Davidson in particular...", p. xi. On the other hand, obsessively anti-Rortyan Christopher Norris from his four recent books about Derrida, deconstruction or "truth" about postmodernism.

(a)methodological charity, perhaps it not so interesting to get into details of the essence of "misunderstanding" in such readings of works of Davidson, Derrida (or Bauman, for that matter) that suggest (be they even non-existing) connections and parallels, as the fate of books is as contingent as our whole postmodern being. There are no non-contingent and universal foundations, thus there is also no author's foundation of a text that *a priori* provides him with greater rights and more important voice in the "cultural conversation" taking place. The voice of the author, traditionally important, has already become at the same time one of many equally valid voices of readers and commentators. On the one hand, one has to take into consideration that "modesty of the age" about which Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe writes almost in the form of the manifesto in his *La Fiction du politique*³, on the other hand it is just with the help of the power of precisely that modesty that philosophy has a still greater possibility - a chance? - to become a commentary to already written and currently being written philosophical works, a commentary to a still enlarging and changing canon of works, a commentary to commentaries. And a commentary always gives birth to a (Bloomian) temptation of a "strong misreading", a "poetic misprision", since, as he says in *The Anxiety of Influence, the meaning of a poem can only be a poem, but another poem - a poem not itself*.⁴

Thus, let us imagine here - Bauman's poem read in the mirror of other poems... What inclines one to make such a reading is also an extremely metaphorical and highly individual way of his writing. It happens in Bauman, let us bear this in mind, that a whole book is supported by several metaphors chosen with impressive erudition and ingenuity. It is difficult to imagine a "rational" discussion of a traditional philosopher

³ "... Could it not be derisory to claim that one is engaged in philosophy, or - still worse - that one is a philosopher?", asks Ph. Lacoue-Labarthe in his *Heidegger, Art and Politics* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990), p. 1.

⁴ Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973), p. 70. "Strong poets" make the history of poetry by misreading one another - it might be asked whether "strong philosophers" could not be making the history of philosophy by misreading one another, by producing their own idiosyncratic sequences of philosophers (just like Rorty creates and uses the sequence "Plato-Kant" or "Nietzsche-Heidegger-Derrida")? The majority of "proper" interpretations of philosophy is worse than mistakes, says Bloom. "Perhaps there are only more or less creative or interesting misreadings"..., p. 43. Rorty's redescrptions and recontextualizations versus Romantic "genius" in poetry?

with metaphors; a metaphor can be confronted with another metaphor, but it is not comfortable in the way arguments are. Just like in the case of Rorty, the construction of an "ironist" produces a distance and pushes the edge of irony in two opposite directions at the same time ("I am saying this, but maybe I am saying that? I am saying this, but only 'ironically', how could I take it 'seriously'" etc. etc.), depending on the actual direction of an attack and the sophistication of polemics, also in Bauman the support of his vision of modernity and postmodernity on several carefully chosen metaphors may bring about similar helplessness of a (traditional) critic. For, let us ask, what is supposed to mean the opposition of "legislators" and "interpreters", "pilgrims" and "wanderers", what are metaphors of "vagabonds", "nomads", "tourists" or "flaneurs", if we would like to look at them with cold eyes of an analytician of the present and decoder of texts devoted to it, strange and insensitive to the poetry of words and the magic of pictures? The method of decoding, deciphering - just like one deciphers the truth - must fail here totally, what a reader is left with is the (Nietzschean) awareness of perspectival character of interpretation and getting out of what the whole history of Western metaphysics has always required him to do, as Derrida noted for the first time in his discussion with Lévi-Strauss in "Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences".⁵ One cannot get away with deciphering metaphors, as, struggling argumentatively with a metaphor, and consequently refuting it, one remains with a meaningless, devoid of significant senses, text.

Metaphors are fundamental in Bauman's thinking of the world - let us listen to a characteristic statement from *Two Essays on Postmodern Morality*; as the metaphor of a nomad as an ideal type is "imperfect and misleading", the only unambiguous task left is:

to look for other metaphors....⁶

⁵ See Jacques Derrida, "Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences" in *Writing and Difference* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), p. 292.

⁶ Zygmunt Bauman, *Two Essays on Postmodern Morality* (in Polish, Warsaw: Instytut Kultury, 1994), p. 20

Bauman confronts an old metaphor with a new one, rather than confronts it with argumentation against an old metaphor, a scrupulous investigator of postmodernity does not confuse levels in thinking of the world and in feeling it, neither in himself, nor in confrontations with others. Who fights with the help of metaphors, dies of metaphors, it could be said. Metaphor as a contribution to a picture of a status of the postmodern intellectual? For as it is difficult to argue with a metaphor, it is also difficult to argue with someone who "passes rapidly from Hemingway to Proust to Hitler to Marx to Foucault to Mary Douglas to the present situation in Southeast Asia to Ghandi to Sophocles", as Richard Rorty says in his *Consequences of Pragmatism* about the post-Philosophical intellectual.⁷ It is difficult to argue with someone who is a "name dropper", an expert of proper names with which he plays being afraid of getting stuck in one vocabulary, one - be it even self-chosen - perspective, one and privileged view of the world. Bauman and his metaphors... Metaphors in Bauman's texts... An explicit - practical - end of a certain way of practising the humanities, philosophy, be it even sociology; an end of a certain figure of the humanist to which modernity managed to get us accustomed. Perhaps the beginning of a new way of thinking of culture in the post-legislative, post-metanarrative, post-Philosophical epoch (as that state is called by Bauman, Lyotard and Rorty, respectively)?

In Bauman, that way of thinking derives from a deep and irreducible suspicion of the project of Modernity which finally, through its "gardening" dreams, had led to the Holocaust, after which "nothing will be the way it was". Lyotard in *Le Différend* calls Auschwitz *le signe d'histoire* or *l'événement*, Lacoue-Labarthe names it his *La Fiction du politique* a *caesura* (*la césure*) of the speculative; apart from saying with the latter that in Auschwitz "God died", that a dark, so far unseen side of modernity manifested itself, one can also say that (German) speculative philosophy with its emancipatory wishes, supported by Reason and History, died there as well. That philosophical side is studied by Germans and Frenchmen, from Theodor W. Adorno from *Negative Dialectics*, Emmanuel Lévinas e.g. from his texts about Blanchot, the whole recent German *Historikerstreit* - the dispute of German historians with the

⁷ Richard Rorty, *Consequences of Pragmatism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press),

participation of Habermas and Tugendhad, to Lyotard from *Heidegger et 'les juifs'*, Lacoue-Labarthe from *La Fiction du politique*, and many others. How to "philosophize after Auschwitz" - that was the question put forward for the first time by Adorno, and in that form it has been present in our culture ever since. By his own means, on his own and following his own paths, Zygmunt Bauman comes to similar, fundamental questions about modernity in his *Modernity and the Holocaust*. Let us listen to him:

Modernity, as we remember, is an age of artificial order and of grand societal designs, the era of planners, visionaries, and - more generally - "gardeners" who treat society as a virgin plot of land to be expertly designed and then cultivated and doctored to keep the designed form.⁸

It seems to be one of the most beautiful (para)definitions of modernity, obviously, knowing Bauman's *façon de parler* - a metaphorical one. Let us think of it for a while and let us read it slightly differently, from a different side and in different vocabularies. "Planners" and "visionaries" may be - let us assume the following descriptions as a "possible world" - traditional intellectuals of the period of modernity, those of great ambitions and superior status in culture; more or less important, more or less philosophically-minded, those who planned the Jacobean Terror and those who planned the Bolshevik terror. (How different faces can assume metaphors of planners can be testified by "glass houses", in Poland, following Zeromski and German *Glasarchitektur*, the hope for "bright" future, while for George Orwell - the nightmare of an accomplished utopia, man subjected to the gaze of the Other, deprived of intimacy, as it is obsessively present in Sartre, Foucault or Barthes, which is beautifully shown - under a general label of "denigration of vision" - in Martin Jay's recent impressive study⁹). Bauman's gardener is not Kosinski's Gardener from *Being There* - he is rather a self-conceited erudite, aware of his exceptional place in culture,

p. xl.

⁸ Zygmunt Bauman, *Modernity and the Holocaust* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1989), p. 113.

⁹ Martin Jay, *Downcast Eyes. The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-Century French Thought* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).

interpreter of the present and planner of the future. Gardeners taking care of a "virgin plot of land" - society, rather than society seen as e.g. "English garden" in which work consists in cultivation and maintenance of the status quo. Gardeners as executioners - those who pull weeds out of the social plot of land (supported by the great idea of "racial hygiene") or who kill (be it even with Zyklon B) bugs, fast disseminating and parasitic on assumption. Sanitary action, hygienic challenge, getting rid of filth and bugs... They were specific gardeners, indeed. So in modernity a virgin plot of land needed planning - and that was done by experts in ideas hired by Leviathan, and needed putting into practice, for which Leviathan had different personae...

What might the euphemism "to keep the designed form" used by Bauman in the above quotation mean? It might mean, for instance, terror to which precise, disciplined and rational bureaucracy was employed; and that bureaucracy lacked just a grand vision of a perfect society, a vision of a better and more just world (which will be e.g. *Judenfrei*, or in which there will be no bourgeoisie or no other "weeds"). "Modern dreams are given absolute power" - says Bauman, and thereby modern genocide is born. And these grand visions are postmodern *métarécits*, Lyotardian great narratives from his *La Condition postmoderne* to which one can only feel distrust today; "gardener" vision of modernity is the vision in which *telos* is already known - the end of present sufferings (and crimes) is future happiness planned by smart minds here and now. Given a traditional role and modern status of intellectuals, these smart minds are never lacking, they are being created and they create themselves. Fortunately, there is fewer and fewer gardeners today. Fewer and fewer candidates for gardeners. For it is no longer that easy to cultivate the garden, and the Idea of future Emancipation no longer appeals to human hearts...

2.

Zygmunt Bauman's books are a perfect pretext to - as well as a perfect point of departure for - the discussion of postmodernity. Bauman's texts can be perfectly located in a certain wider manner of thinking about culture and society present today, and perhaps therefore we would like to assume in that essay the following guiding principle (of a sort): we will be reading Bauman and commenting on his texts

immediately, we will be undressing his metaphors and suggesting different ones, linking his thinking with that of those he never refers to, or does it rarely and unwillingly. We will be presenting a more general commentary to a more detailed one, taking samples from his various books and looking at them through a magnifying glass of a philosophical investigation. We will place some fragments in "proper" contexts, listening carefully to the author's intentions, some others we will violently pull out of the context, without taking into account possible damage and destruction of harmony of the author's well-groomed garden of thought. Bauman's text will be providing life-blood to our reflection, it will be giving it more power with power of its own.

Let us take into consideration the opening sentence from *Freedom*, Bauman's book on freedom published in 1988, which is the sentence quoted by him from the so-called common knowledge just in order to promptly repudiate it: "You can say what you wish. This is a free country".¹⁰ The author dismantles it and listens to its possible senses when he says e.g. that

We *can* do what we wish, without fear of being punished, thrown in jail, tortured, persecuted. Let us note, however, that the expression is silent about how effective our action will be. "Free country" does not guarantee that what we do will reach its purpose, or what we say will be accepted. ... And so the expression tells us also that being in a *free* country means doing things on one's own responsibility. One is free to pursue (and, with luck, to achieve) one's aims, but one is also free to err.¹¹

And there is no way to disagree with the above. We can, however, look at the above sentence from a different perspective of the person who made a living of speaking and writing, whose task it was to speak and write, who was even listened to: from the perspective of the man of letters endowed with the Enlightenment authority, one of

¹⁰ Zygmunt Bauman, *Freedom* (London: Open University Press, 1988), p. 1.

¹¹ *Ibidem*, p. 1.

those *les philosophes*, an inhabitant of *la république des lettres* and then - following the "Dreyfus affair" - just *l'intellectuel*.¹²

So: "You can say what you wish. This is a free country". Philosophy (and, more generally, the whole culture of today), despite misleading appearances of having found a solution to that problem by way of taste, decency, even the law, is still having trouble within itself with those who are taking that statement too seriously. Questions of an ethical nature are being born all the time. Nobody knows for sure which standards to appeal to, as together with the exhaustion of the Enlightenment project which has brought its own figure of the intellectual to highest peaks, what is also getting exhausted is the power that place was still recently giving and which those in question made use of. As long as it was clear what the role and place of the intellectual in culture was (an intellectual in a European, especially French sense of the term, rather unknown in the United States, which seems not to know or have known such role as played by Habermas in Germany or Sartre and later - at least functionally - Foucault in France), so long it was easy to pass judgements on others as the canon of behavior was as known as the model of one meter from Sevres near Paris. Today, however, in a totally new and - still - unexpected situation, there appear questions for which there are no ready answers. Numerous philosophers participate in thinking about these questions - the question is a spark from which an interesting polemic takes its origin.

Let us take the following point into consideration, departing for a moment from Bauman's books to take a long detour to return to them after a while: what may underlie such a concentration of attention and energy on seemingly simple questions about life on the one hand, and work on the other hand, of several twentieth century philosophers and theorists, or on absurd and seemingly easy to refute theses of several inspired historians (revisionists) of the Holocaust. So, to put it clearly: for instance, Martin Heidegger, Paul de Man, Robert Faurisson (bearing in mind relative insignificance and caricatural nature of the latter figure). What Heidegger said - and about what he kept silence when others were speaking or leaving the Germany full of

¹² See in this context about the "Dreyfus Affair" the chapter "Emil Zola: the Citizen Against the State" from *The Dreyfus Affair and the American Conscience* by Egal Feldman (Wayne

hatred at the time, and when others were speaking having returned to post-war Germany. Why Heidegger kept silence right until his death, even in his Spiegel interview, his silence was indeed "unbearable" and "inexcusable", as Lyotard and Lacoue-Labarthe say.¹³ Was Paul de Man a hidden anti-Semite when he was writing his Belgium wartime journalism, was he an anti-Semite later on, at Yale? What is common to Nietzsche, Heidegger, de Man - and Derrida in all these ethical contexts? What is going to happen to deconstruction (as an American school of literary criticism) in the light of all these "revelations", widely used e.g. by the press? And finally Robert Faurisson who explicitly negates the existence of gas chambers in Auschwitz: what did he betray and break away from that he was able to incite such an intellectual storm in France, as he must have betrayed something, for, just like in the case of previous questions, the wound was so painful that needed years-long polemics from various French thinkers at the same time. How to "live with Faurisson" (to treat that *casus* a little bit wider), how to "discuss" with him, without bringing him to the (undeserved) level of a partner in discussion who is endowed with equal rights? These are some ethical questions of France and the United States (although, it is important to bear in mind, that, in Lyotard's formulation, *L'affaire Heidegger est une affaire française*), these are some questions of philosophers who take their culture seriously and who has sensitive ears to what is going on in it. How frail must be the place in culture of the intellectual in France today if a Faurisson is able to bother so much so many eminent philosophers? Pierre Vidal-Naquet in all his essays from the volume *Les Assassins de la mémoire: 'Un Eichmann de papier' et autres essais sur le révisionisme* returns constantly to a question fundamental to him: is one to get into "polemics" with the theses of revisionists, how not to ennoble them by means of locating them within a scientific debate, how to write knowing that the discussion with Faurisson is, as he puts

State University Press, 1981) or Jean-Denis Bredin, *The Affair. The Case of Alfred Dreyfus* (New York: George Braziller, 1986), the third section entitled "Two Frances", pp. 245-358.

¹³ As Jean-Francois Lyotard in *Heidegger and "the jews"* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990) and Ph. Lacoue-Labarthe in already referred to *Heidegger, Art and Politics* put it.

it, "absolutely impossible"¹⁴, how to fight with lies and bad faith - and fight or not fight? Such and similar questions are being currently asked all over the world, in books and articles, during seminars and conferences; what is that "freedom of the intellectual" - and what is his "ethics" today. When undisturbed being of leaders of human souls is being disturbed, these leaders go in for self-analysis, they deal with themselves or with their predecessors, they look for their own definitions of themselves (and therefore Zygmunt Bauman says in *Legislators and Interpreters* that all definitions of intellectuals are "self-definitions"¹⁵). When their self-image is shaking, then so is their place in culture, life-long vocation, the meaning of their work as well as the effort to question the reality. It is not accidentally that the questions about thinkers shown here as examples are important today - some twenty years ago nobody would care so much about them, nobody would pay so much attention (let us also remember that, generally, they are still not important in America except for some Continentally-minded thinkers).¹⁶ A well-formed, modern ethos of the intellectual is commonly known, it seemed to be present in culture for good. Now culture changes its mind and seems to take rights and privileges away from him.

Within the horizon that interests us here, let us take into consideration, by way of an example, a couple of great figures from philosophy of the recent two hundred years who determined the shape of today's Continental philosophy - (Kojève's) Hegel and (Derrida's and Deleuze's) Nietzsche. Alexandre Kojève said: "... the future of the world, and thereby the meaning of the present and the sense of the future, will depend,

¹⁴ Pierre Vidal-Naquet, *Assassins of Memory. Essays on the Denial of the Holocaust* (Columbia University Press, 1992), p. 2.

¹⁵ Zygmunt Bauman, *Legislators and Interpreters. On Modernity, Post-Modernity and Intellectuals* (Oxford: Polity Press, 1987), p. 8.

¹⁶ Perhaps one should separate an intellectual's "speaking" from his "writing"? Perhaps the intellectual is only the one who is writing (starting with - written - Zola's "Manifesto of the Intellectuals"), although one can also look at the collection of famous pictures: Sartre and Foucault, two giants of post-war France, Foucault speaking with a megaphone, Sartre handing in leaflets to passers-by. Smiling, happy, *speaking* to the crowd gathered around. May '68 is in turn a (written) "narrative explosion" (Lyotard), but also a madness of loud speaking after years of silence, the beginning of struggle with the "confiscation of a discourse", as Foucault and Deleuze called it. So perhaps he should speak - but only if he had written before?

in the final analysis, on the contemporary interpretations of Hegelian works"¹⁷, to shorten it and to disregard nuances - *the future of the world will depend on our reading of Hegel*. It is important today to remember the earnestness of that belief and the constant presence of it in the tradition of philosophy, common, incidentally, also to Husserl from his last lectures in Prague and Vienna and to Heidegger after *Kehre* to whom one can attribute a (paraphrased) saying - the future of the (German) world - but also that of Europe - will depend on our reading of Hölderlin. Let us read Hegel and let us read Hölderlin, let us read the Thinker and let us read the Poet, and we shall influence the world directly and effectively...¹⁸ The questions about Hegel, as is well known, dominated (almost) whole French post-war thought - as Michel Foucault said in *L'Ordre du discours* in 1970: "our whole epoch is trying to disengage itself from Hegel", as Hegel from *Phenomenology of Spirit* in anthropologized reading of Kojève used to dominate a great part of philosophical imagination of the French for over a quarter of a century.¹⁹ A violent contrast to - and antidote against - Hegel became Nietzsche, but not the Nietzsche as seen over the period of thirty years by Walter Kaufman in the USA (in his influential *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist*) but rather the Nietzsche as seen by the French of the sixties first (and then, in the eighties, in America by e.g. Alexander Nehamas and Richard Rorty²⁰). Nietzsche who is light and "perspectival", the author of "Truth and Lies in the Extra-Moral Sense" rather than the author of *The Will to Power*, a self-creator who asks about "style" (Derrida) and who has a "sense of humor" (Rorty) rather than a philosopher full of seriousness and convinced of his "mission", "used" (or "abused") later on by still more serious philosophers like Heidegger.

¹⁷ Alexandre Kojève, cited in Vincent Descombes, *Modern French Philosophy* (Cambridge, CUP, 1980), p. 9.

¹⁸ Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe wrote about Hölderlin - whose "imagined Greece" influenced the German imagination starting with Hegel, then through Nietzsche and finally Heidegger - in the volume *Typography, Mimesis, Philosophy, Politics* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), in the text "Hölderlin and Greeks", pp. 236-247.

¹⁹ Of which reminds Vincent Descombes in his *Modern French Philosophy* in a chapter on "humanization of nothingness", pp. 9-54.

²⁰ See Alexander Nehamas, *Nietzsche. Life as Literature* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985) and Richard Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

The passage from Hegel to Nietzsche took place in French culture in the sixties and since then it is quite rare to hear someone saying that the (Kojévian) "future of the world" may depend on the reading of Nietzsche, or of *any other* philosopher, to be exact. The philosopher who is most explicit about it is Richard Rorty, which brings violent storms to his philosophizing from both sides, both from the (philosophical and political) right and from the left, that is also what Zygmunt Bauman says, although not in a vocabulary of philosophy and that of philosophy but in the vocabulary of sociological reflection or in fundamental metaphors built by him. Bauman's "powerlessness of an intellectual", his gradual "retreat to the Academy"²¹, subsidized and devoid of any contact with resistant matter of reality, his *interpretive* rather than *legislative* reason, his metaphors of a "vagabond" and a "tourist" - translated into philosophical language - may just mean the awareness of the end of traditional attitudes not of a philosopher, but of the intellectual in general. His *Intimations of Postmodernity, Legislators and Interpreters*, and finally *Modernity and Ambivalence* seem to testify in a totally different language to the same phenomenon of postmodern world: diagnosed by Lyotard *l'incrédulité à l'égard des métarécits*, incredulity common and justified, brings about a crisis of the producer of those metanarratives (as Lyotard put it crudely in his *Tombeau de l'intellectuel*). Reading Bauman in such a context - among such thinkers as Foucault, Rorty, Lyotard or his favorite, Baudrillard - may turn out to be extremely instructive, accounting for the very same phenomena in a different vocabulary, in totally different metaphors and within a different tradition of thinking about culture in general.

One can think whether it might not be the case that the pair Hegel/Nietzsche is somehow parallel to that of modern and postmodern intellectuals, needless to say, such Hegel from behind of whom Kojève the Marxist and the Heideggerian is winking at us,

²¹ Zygmunt Bauman, *Intimations of Postmodernity* (London: Routledge, 1992). Let us listen to these descriptions: "Having reached the nadir of their political relevance, modern intellectuals enjoy freedom of thought and expression they could not dream of at the time that *words mattered politically*. This is an autonomy of no practical consequence outside the self-enclosed world of intellectual discourse", p. 16). Paradoxically enough, at least apparently, the growth in the irrelevance of legitimation - traditionally provided to the state by intellectuals - brings about the growth in intellectual freedom that, at the same time, stops to mean anything in practice.

and such Nietzsche who is opposed to Hegel in the strongest way perhaps by Deleuze in *Nietzsche and Philosophy*. Asking what Hegel was doing - and what was doing Nietzsche, and how French thought made a radical passage from the former to the latter, we are asking about a (new) figure of the intellectual today, as the change of his or her status may be also a consequence of that passage. Nietzsche may turn out to be a key turning point for today's discussions, from Derrida and Deleuze, Deleuze and Guattari from *Anti-Oedipus*, Lyotard from *Economie libidinale*, or - in the USA where discussions of Nietzsche became fervent in the eighties - Allan Bloom on the one hand (with his "Nietzscheanized America") and Richard Rorty on the other (in whom Nietzsche is opposed to Heidegger - the one who "took philosophy (too) seriously", as he says in the title of one of his reviews²²). "The New Nietzsche", to hint at David Allison's influential volume, becomes in that context an important question today, and the link between the "intellectual", "freedom" and Nietzsche may be a link of a fundamental importance.

Thus, to sum up, one could think of two opposite poles in thinking about the role of philosophy: on the one pole there would be Hegel (and Kojève) who link the fate of the world to philosophy (as well as a "serious" Heidegger - who tells us to read Hölderlin - and even the "last metaphysician" and the "inverted Platonic" Nietzsche in the reading of the latter), on the other one there would be the same Nietzsche but this time as a model of self-creation who is not bothered by the fate of the world because has different questions and different concerns (closer e.g. to Marcel Proust). The differences of positions taken appear still today e.g. when what Heidegger did (wrote, said) in the famous year of 1933 is being discussed. Lyotard and Lacoue-Labarthe write that Heidegger's silence about the Holocaust is *impardonnable*, while Rorty wants to separate Heidegger's "life" from his "work" saying that the latter as a person turned out to be "a nasty figure", which, nevertheless, does not affect much his philosophy (and it is easy according to him to conceive of "another possible world" in

²² Richard Rorty, "Taking Philosophy Seriously", *New Republic*, April 1988.

which he actually leaves Germany - and we are reading today the same philosophy of his²³).

3.

Having finished that somehow long detour, let us have a quick look at a certain traditional and well-rooted model in sociological and philosophical thinking of culture; Zygmunt Bauman says about it the following:

All wills are free, but some wills are freer than others; some people, who knowingly or unknowingly perform the function of educators, instil (or modify) the cognitive predispositions, moral values and aesthetic preferences of others and thus introduce certain shared elements into their intentions and ensuing actions.²⁴

And here we are, with that one simple sentence, in the very heart of controversies that we are interested in - from the Platonic notion of *basileia* (leading to philosophers-kings), from the "Seventh Letter", via Kant's "Was ist Aufklärung?" and its Foucauldian interpretations, via Hegel - for whom it was a period of "madness", as he puts it, when he thought of himself as being an incarnation of the Absolute Spirit (as a mortal can only be God for Kirillov from *The Possessed*), to Heidegger's *Führung* and his belief that the philosopher can be a part of something greater, e.g. of that "movement" glorified perhaps for purely philosophical reasons rather than personal and mean ones... The quotation from Bauman leads us also to the consideration of the belief from Marx' "Theses on Feuerbach" that *Die Philosophen haben die Welt nur verschieden interpretiert; es kommt aber drauften, sie zu verändern* that Derrida takes into account in his recent *Specters de Marx*.²⁵ As it is one of constant motifs of the

²³ Richard Rorty, "Another Possible World", *Proceedings on Heidegger's Politics*, October 1988.

²⁴ Zygmunt Bauman, *Freedom*, op. cit., p. 6.

²⁵ See Jacques Derrida, *Spectres de Marx. L'Etat de la dette, le travail du deuil et la nouvelle Internationale* (Paris: Galilée, 1993).

tradition of philosophy: there is a group of people who know more than others due to having access to a truth, who disclose truth with the help of their intellects and - if need be - present it to the world in a softer, more common way. The religious metaphor of a shepherd and the herd fits here perfectly, a philosopher-prophet would always tell people "what to do". He is an unquestionable authority as he knows the deepest (the metaphors of removing surface layers of appearances to get to a hidden essence!) context, the philosophical one. An authority that looks at things and judges them "from a philosophical point of view", that is, from the point of view of the world, humanity, the universal rather than the particular, the eternal rather than the contingent etc. etc. The conversation with him required one to raise (Platonic "cave" metaphors again!) to a philosophical level on the part of the interlocutor. As Rorty wrote in his *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* - the philosopher expressed his opinion about all questions, and his voice was the most important one in almost any discussion (as he was supported by the authority of philosophy itself).

Bauman says that "the free individual, far from being a universal condition of humankind, is a historical and social creation".²⁶ Freedom of an individual cannot be taken for granted, it is a relative novelty in the history of mankind, "a novelty closely connected with the advent of modernity and capitalism".²⁷ Bauman's melancholic remark about the advent - and possible departure - of freedom has to be supplemented by an optimistic vision, also supported by an awareness of common contingency, the vision of freedom as a historical, social creation, but also one that human beings create themselves. The vision of freedom in self-creation and through self-creation in the situation in which there is no other "road to freedom". And when Bauman refers (allusively) to Orwell from *Animal Farm* - why there are supposed to be voices of equal and more equal, free and freer wills - then one could suggest an answer that such voices and such wills may be coined in arduous, individual effort, and that, surely, their freedom and significance of their voices do not come today from some legitimacy, from power of the discipline they represent, in the name of which they express their views. So in the situation in which the place traditionally (historically and

²⁶ Zygmunt Bauman, *Freedom*, op. cit., p.7.

socially) accorded to the intellectual in culture is getting more and more deserted, one perhaps might attempt to take it on a quite different basis, with one's own effort, with the help of power of one's own projects... Rorty's "freedom as recognition of contingency"²⁸ and Bauman's (quoted from Agnes Heller) motto about "transforming our contingency into our destiny" from *Modernity and Ambivalence* may have a lot in common although with one important exception - Rorty's account leads optimistically to the awareness of the possibility of surpassing oneself, Bauman's account may (though does not necessarily have to) lead to fatalism. That fatalism can be heard in Agnes Heller:

An individual has transformed his or her contingency into his or her destiny if this person has arrived at the consciousness of having made the *best* out of his or her practically infinite possibilities. A society has transformed its contingency into a destiny if the members of this society arrive at the awareness that they would prefer to live at no other place and at no other time than here and now.²⁹

It seems better not to have the feeling of fulfilment, and to aim always at something which cannot be reached, rather than to live with the possibility that one is a citizen of the only accessible, and at the same time the "best" of possible worlds (as we remember Faust promising to give in to Mephistopheles in Goethe the moment he is satisfied with a "moment", saying "Let it last! It is beautiful!"). It may be better not to fix the level of possibilities on the one of reality... It may be better to trust (Romantic) imagination, with all postmodern reservations, than (totalitarian) self-complacency of inhabitants of Oceania or Eurasia... It is important to remember about threats of fatalism and of melancholy of that Bauman's vision.

Thus freedom in Bauman's account is a construct to which we are not allowed to get accustomed, as the world of which it is a product is contingent itself, and may

²⁷ Ibidem, p. 7.

²⁸ Richard Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, op. cit., p. 47.

disappear any time at all. That is a philosophically justified melancholy, but it may be also connected with melancholy or pessimism so evident in Michel Foucault - in his account of "power". Freedom, Bauman says, is not a property, a quality which an individual can have or can not have, "freedom exists only as a social relation": "It makes sense only as an opposition to some other condition, past or present".³⁰ Just like there are no free and coerced, there are also no ruling and ruled, those who hold power and fight to maintain it and those who are deprived of it and dream of having it, as "power is everywhere", it is of a "capillary" nature, as it penetrates everything... It is a relation rather than a property whose some (chosen) possess, others (temporarily worse-off) do not possess, but might do if only they made another effort, another step on the road leading to emancipation, if they only wished to - preferably by means of the revolution which would "seize" power. Power in this account is not something that one seizes, then losses, power works from a multitude of points, from below, in a word: "power is everywhere; not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere", as Michel Foucault says in the first volume of his *History of Sexuality*.³¹ One does not "have" freedom (Bauman) just like one does not "have" power (Foucault) Freedom - like power in such an account - exists only between individuals. Both accounts are pessimistic, the first leaves little room for will to individual freedom, the other leaves little room for hope for resistance, for which Foucault was reproached many times during his life and afterwards.³²

If we were to look for a moment to the most famous Odyssey of Spirit, the Hegelian *Phenomenology*, then it would turn out that freedom can organize thinking about history and history of philosophy perfectly well. From the freedom of an "oriental despot", and only his, via freedom of some, that is to say, freedom of that "top

²⁹ Agnes Heller quoted in Zygmunt Bauman, *Modernity and Ambivalence* (Oxford: Polity Press, 1992), p. 234.

³⁰ Zygmunt Bauman, *Freedom*, op. cit., p. 7, p. 7.

³¹ Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality. An Introduction*, vol. I (New York: Vintage Books, 1978), p. 93.

³² The role of "hope" with reference to Foucault is most important to Richard Rorty. The reproaches I have in mind come e.g. from Michael Walzer from the text on "lonely politics of Michel Foucault" in his *The Company of Critics* or from Edward Said from his "Foucault and the Imagination of Power" in *Foucault: A Critical Reader*, ed. D. Hoy (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986).

of an iceberg" in Ancient Greece in Hegel's memorable expression, to the culmination of freedom in the period of (post)revolutionary France - in a radical contrast to that "misery" of German life, on the one hand; on the other hand the dialectic of *Herrschaft und Knechtschaft* and struggle for recognition, freedom only as freedom recognized by the Other, deprived of it (who promptly, however - owing to his work - turns out to be more free than his master as the latter appears from a distance to be just a dead end of history, *une impasse existentielle*, as Kojève says of him³³). The Idea of Emancipation turns out today to be a more and more a modern illusion, perhaps the greatest and the most persistent metanarrative. Incredulity towards it, however, is something else than incredulity towards freedom. There is perhaps the possibility of freedom without the Idea of Emancipation. How is one to reconcile the lack of *arche* and *telos* at the same time, the lack of simple history as an incarnation of the Idea of emancipation of the humanity (Napoleon on the outskirts of Iena would be such a simple history), preferably with the help of the power of Reason appreciated by Enlightenment - with dreams of "free man" from declarations and constitutions of the times of the Revolution? It seems, to push the differences to an extreme, that the answer today might be the (Nietzschean-Bloomian-Rortyan) self-creation, but it might also be the (Baumanian-Baudrillardian) fatalism and melancholy, to sketch here caricatures of two extreme possibilities of attitudes. Since how is one to describe such statements as Bauman's: "In our society, individual freedom is constituted as, first and foremost, freedom of the consumer"³⁴ from *Freedom* or

No determination, no chance; just a soft, pliable game without set or predictable denouement, a game which exhausts itself fully in the aggregate of players and their moves. ... This world promises no security but no impotence either; it offers neither certainty nor despair; only the joy of a right move and the grief of a failed one

³³ Alexandre Kojève, *Introduction à la lecture de Hegel* (Paris: Gallimard, 1947), p. 25.

³⁴ Zygmunt Bauman, *Freedom*, op. cit., pp. 7-8.

from a gloomy, para-Baudrillardian picture drawn in *Mortality, Immortality and Other Life Strategies*.³⁵

Indeed, the first choice to be made would be to abandon "the vocabulary parasitic on the hope of (or determination for) universality, certainty and transparency", as we are fully aware of the omnipresence of contingency, the question appears, however, whether we can afford the luxury of "abandoning all hopes" (to refer to a classic formulation)? Instead of lost hopes there may be enough room for other hopes, smaller, more moderate, one of them might perhaps be (philosophical, literary, artistic, emotional etc.) self-creation. Then there might be a chance that one will be a consumer, which is probably inescapable today, but not a consumer first and foremost. "Freedom of a consumer" and the very Baudrillardian *la société de consommation* are strongly pessimistic motifs if one is to use them to study postmodern society. Sometimes Bauman, like Baudrillard, like Foucault, does not leave much hope for a reader, he may appear then as a grave-digger of modernity who enters postmodernity with a sense of depression, but sometimes he presents a bright and ravishing picture of today's culture, as in *Life in Fragments. Essays in Postmodern Morality* and in *Postmodern Ethics*, to which I devote the last section of my paper.

4.

Bauman's books are to a large extent works of a moralist in the best sense of the term who is bothered by moral dilemmas of modernity and postmodernity. *Life in Fragments* and *Postmodern Ethics* seem to be the culmination of these moral deliberations.³⁶ Let us confine ourselves here to the former book, though. Bauman says in it for instance the following:

There is neither cause nor reason for morality; the necessity to be moral, and the meaning of being moral, can neither be demonstrated nor logically deduced. And so morality is as contingent as the rest of being: it

³⁵ Zygmunt Bauman, *Mortality, Immortality and Other Life Strategies* (Oxford: Polity Press, 1992), p. 187.

has no ethical foundations. We can no more offer ethical guidance for the moral selves, no more “legislate” morality, or hope to gain such ability

...³⁷

It is so, however, that today's loss of belief in foundations as such is not by any means reducible to the past belief that ethical foundations have not been *discovered* yet, the author makes it precise. What results from it for us, those living in postmodernity? It means for us sharpening of our own moral responsibility, as we are "facing the chaos", which is to say at the same time that we are "forced to stand face-to-face with [our] moral autonomy and so also with [our] moral responsibility".³⁸ The postmodern world appears to Bauman as a *chance* for one's own responsibility and one's own choice rather than the responsibility and choice grounded in metanarratives. Each moral step is difficult as it is one's own step as we are deprived of any big moral background and big moral advisors of modernity. So the consciousness of contingency is total. We ourselves are contingent as children of time and chance (as Rorty likes to put it), our personality is contingent, as well as society in which we are leading our (contingent) lives. Philosophy that we are dealing with assumes a contingent form, the form determined just by other contingencies (as a great skeptic Odo Marquard says in a subtitle of a fragment from his *Apologie des Zufälligen*: "We human beings are always more our contingencies than our choices"³⁹). We are drowning in an ocean of contingencies having lost the grounds of a clearly fixed determination... Deprived of a supporting point, accustomed to it for such a long time, we are waving our hands crying for help which will never come as it cannot come... "Ethical paradox of postmodernity" - "moral responsibility comes together with the loneliness of moral choice", as Bauman says in *Intimations of Postmodernity*...⁴⁰

³⁶ Zygmunt Bauman, *Postmodern Ethics* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993); *Life in Fragments. Essays in Postmodern Morality* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995)

³⁷ Zygmunt Bauman, *Life in Fragments. Essays in Postmodern Morality*, op. cit., p 18.

³⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 43.

³⁹ Odo Marquard, *In Defence of the Accidental* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), p. 118.

⁴⁰ Zygmunt Bauman, *Intimations of Postmodernity*, op. cit., p. xxii.

How is one to live in a moral world devoid of traditional foundations? How is one to live in a post-1989 world "without an alternative" (i.e. without the other pole of a nourishing utopia)? How is one to live if philosophy is supposed to be just a (Rortyan) "conversation of mankind"? How, and for how long, one can - meaningfully, usefully and "interestingly" - converse about philosophy within the framework of a philosophical language game? What at the same time, however, is the alternative to that postmodern cultural conversation (of those "name-droppers" from *Consequences of Pragmatism*) - perhaps the *only* alternative is a much worse deep illusion of one's own philosophical necessity and, in broader terms, the necessity of philosophy itself...

Bauman writes about "ethically non-grounded morality" - "uncontrolled and unpredictable". The loneliness of moral choice is that of man devoid of higher than "here and now" senses, of plans further than the *hic et nunc* generation. But it is always to be born in mind that the greatest fear (at least in modernity) had always come from those in whom flame in eyes had been accompanied by the certainty of a rightly chosen Idea, rightly chosen *telos*, rather than from mere psychopaths. *Telos* used to sanctify crimes of today, sanctify present wrongs, being a bright point in the future which gives birth to darkness on the earth today (let us remind here of Bakunin and Nietschayev's "Catechism of the Revolutionary": "the revolutionary breaks any possible connection with a civilized world. If he is in touch with it, it is only in order to destroy it" or "What ought to be moral for the revolutionary is what co-operates with revolution, what ought to be immoral and criminal for him is what stands in its way"). "Legislative", modern thinking brings about "gardener" practice, weeds are being pulled out on the basis of hygienic procedures. A legislator-gardener as a modern incarnation of evil, evil that is born just because someone "knows better" what others want? How, in Max Horkheimer's words, to "be on the side of the temporal against merciless eternity"? How to live when no "horror!" (to use the unforgettable expression of Kurtz from the ending of *The Heart of Darkness*) can be explained by means of tension between (inexisting but promised) future and (all-too-known) present? When the present is no longer merely another point of a pilgrimage to a known goal, no longer another - still higher each time - stage in coming to the promised land, no longer another suffering here for the sake of future brightness there? Bauman says that

modernity “was an effort to make sure that in the end it would be proven that it had not been in vain; to force the legitimation in advance to confirm itself *ex post facto*”.⁴¹

Obviously, the "effort" here may be also a soft euphemism, one could perhaps just say: it was often hatred, a crime, a lie (not the Greek, "noble" one). Obviously, hatred, crime and lie which were modern and rational - because, as Bauman says, "feelers of hesitations go deep: to the very heart of the 'project of Modernity'".⁴² *Modernity and the Holocaust* is a moving testimony to Bauman's disappointment first, then his disbelief and anger, then, finally, his accusation... Therefore the author does not spare philosophers of modernity when he says that "universality was the weapon and honor of philosophers" - but today little in the world seems to depend on what, and if anything at all, they are saying, as

the philosophers' truth ran short of eligible bachelors to be married to;
there seems to be no escape from spinsterhood.⁴³

There is no longer any history - there is just a chronology, there is no progress - just development, no great plans - just contingency, and in Bauman's view philosophers are not to be blamed for it. As, in his vivid description summarizing in a way a hundred or so years of history of philosophy, "it is not the philosophers who failed to place the groundless and contingent being on secure foundations; it is rather that the building gear has been snatched from their hands, not in order to be given to others, less deserving and trustworthy, but to join the dreams of universal reason in the dustbin of dashed hopes and unkept promises".⁴⁴ Thus today's culture - in a common view of Bauman on the one hand, and "postmodernists" (in its European rather than American sense of the vague term) on the other - seems not to be looking for successors of philosophers, nobody seems to compete with them today, as they used to compete with priests and scientists in the past. Great metanarratives - with the one of Emancipation in the forefront - have been severely dirtied and dreadfully abused. Hence incredulity,

⁴¹ Zygmunt Bauman, *Life in Fragments*, op. cit., p 22.

⁴² Zygmunt Bauman, *Modernity and the Holocaust*, op. cit., p. 65.

⁴³ Zygmunt Bauman, *Life in Fragments*, op. cit., p. 25.

hyper-sensitivity and carefulness of the philosophical discourse of postmodernity. Especially considering the fact that while the role of normative, universal ethics seems to be commonly criticized, the sense of justice and injustice (Lyotard's "wrong" as opposed to a mere "damage", his *tort* and his *dommage*) or the sensitivity to pain and humiliation (e.g. in Rorty's utopian figure of a "liberal ironist") are still growing. Philosophers, to sum up, do not give their privileges to someone else as they received them once from priests, it is rather that the very privileges disappear, turning out to be a useful illusion produced for the needs of modernity...

It is not easy to reconcile with it for quite a few. To return to Bauman, "Legislators cannot imagine an orderly world without legislation; the ethical legislator or preacher cannot imagine a world without a legislated ethics".⁴⁵ The decline of ethics does not necessarily have to mean the decline of morality, in a new vocabulary of moral deliberation of - post-ethical, post-legislative - postmodernity, one of the key words will surely be *responsibility*. As people at large with unprecedented freedom given to them may be building their moral identity just on responsibility. Moral autonomy may be constituted by responsibility itself. Is philosophy (together with ethics) in such a case a merely (intellectual) "vagabondage", just like a philosopher is a postmodern "vagabond" of the philosophical tradition? Is philosophical vagabondage to endure the test of time, will it reconcile with its relatively inferior status granted to it by postmodern culture? "The path of vagabondage is created during the journey itself" and nobody knows where it will lead us to - "the point is not to lose the ability to move" (Bauman)...

I want to stop my discussion of Bauman and the question of the intellectual with the following quotation from his Copernican Lectures given in Torun, Poland (and let me add that it is one of the most clear-cut and courageous description of what may be going on in the humanities at the moment): "The stakes is the value of the capital accumulated by old-fashioned firms called philosophy, sociology, or the humanities, in which we all are at the same time paid functionaries and shareholders. The stakes is the current use and exchange value of commodities gathered over the

⁴⁴ Ibidem, p. 25.

years in firm's warehouses. The stakes is the usefulness of firm's statutes and regulations which we have learnt by heart, and in the application of which we have become masters. The stakes is the peace of mind, blissful certainty of authority, the sense of meaningfulness of what one is doing..." If Bauman is right in his diagnosis, there is a lot of work to be done...

⁴⁵ Ibidem, p. 36.