Troubled Identity and the Modern World
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Troubled Identity and the Modern World

Leonidas Donskis
This book is affectionately and lovingly dedicated to
Janina Bauman and Zygmunt Bauman
Neither heavenly nor earthly, neither mortal nor immortal have we created thee, so that thou mightest be free according to thy own will and honor, to be thy own creator and builder. To thee alone we gave growth and development depending on thy own free will. Thou bearest in thee the germs of a universal life.

—Comte Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, 
Oratio de Hominis Dignitate

He [Pirandello] starts with the question: Who am I? What proof have I for my own identity other than the continuation of my physical self? His answer is not like Descartes’—the affirmation of the individual self—but its denial: I have no identity, there is no self excepting the one which is the reflex of what others expect me to be: I am “as you desire me.” This loss of identity then makes it still more imperative to conform; it means that one can be sure of oneself only if one lives up to the expectations of others. If we do not live up to this picture we not only risk disapproval and increased isolation, but we risk losing the identity of our personality, which means jeopardizing sanity.

—Erich Fromm, Escape from Freedom

The idea of “identity” was born out of the crisis of belonging and out of the effort it triggered to bridge the gap between the “ought” and the “is” and to lift reality to the standards set by the idea—to remake the reality in the likeness of the idea.

—Zygmunt Bauman, Identity: 
Conversations with Benedetto Vecchi
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In this book, I attempt to cover a discursive and existential territory of the opposed modes of self-comprehension and identity. Focus is on the troubled identity, that is, an identity that constantly needs the assurance and confirmation. The task of this study is if not to cover an immense territory of, as Zygmunt Bauman would say, the unholy trinity of modernity—uncertainty, unsafety, and insecurity, then at least to enter and partly explore it. The central themes and main foci of the book are competing memories, the will-to-remember versus the will-to-forget, nationalism and patriotism, ambiguous person, fear and hatred of the modern world; anti-Semitism and other antimodernist obsessions, fanaticism, the loss of roots, the decline of the public domain; the new forms of wandering in the world, and forgeries of historical and cultural identity.

Offering these foci, I try to relate some issues in self-comprehension and identity with ideological and political animosities, and also with the struggles over interpretations of self and of the world. The distinctive element of the book is the ambition of its author to uncover the elusive links between theory and bias, rationality and superstition, the troubled identity and political thought. One of the pivotal questions of the book is: Why do the fear and hatred of the modern world walk in the guise of fidelity to Tradition, whose “discovery” is also a distinctive trait of modernity? Other crucial questions will be: How does our infatuation with identity relate to the loss of the sense of belonging? Why do our fear and hatred of the modern world inevitably masquerade as faith, love, compassion, faithfulness to tradition, and the alternative forms of universalism? Why do we need a strong identity in our days?

The book is composed as a dialogue with such major modern thinkers as Zygmunt Bauman, Louis Dumont, Ernest Gellner, Robert Ginsberg, and Vytautas Kavolis. Setting aside their rich contribution to political and moral philosophy, social criticism, and social theory in general, they embody and represent different perspectives on modernity and identity: A British sociologist of Polish background,
a French anthropologist and historian of ideas, a British philosopher and anthropologist of Central European background, an American philosopher, and an émigré Lithuanian sociologist of culture and civilizational theorist who spent much of his time in the United States.

I am especially indebted to Zygmunt Bauman whose great theoretical sensitivity and unique scholarship came to me as a deep inspiration. May this book serve as a token of my appreciation for his great books and for my long conversations with him and Janina Bauman on identity and on what it means to be an Eastern or Central European in the contemporary world.

In addition to these social and civilizational theorists, I use the interpretations of modern identity in the literary works and essays of my favorite writers, such as George Orwell and Milan Kundera. This is to say that I take some issues from my studies in politics and culture and further develop them, refracting through the works of fictional and nonfictional writers, so that the reader can grasp why and how some authors cover the aspects of troubled identity in the modern world fictionally, whereas others would do it academically and theoretically.

The book rests on my personal experience, as I spent many years outside of my native Lithuania as a wandering scholar, researching and lecturing in the United States, the United Kingdom, Sweden, Finland, Estonia, and Hungary. I tried my utmost to refract the conceptual content of the book through my experience as a scholar, a political commentator, and a host of a Lithuanian TV program. This book, a blend of theoretical insight and polemic, incorporated into a documented narrative structure, offers a personal perspective on the troubled identity and the modern world. It is the outcome of my experience in different educational systems, societies, and cultures.

To avoid confusion, I consciously incorporate segments of my previous works into the new book, recontextualizing, redefining, updating, redeveloping, or rethinking the main foci of my previous books. Those segments serve as an anticipation of the book to come. It is the nonfinished, the nonfinito, or a deliberately unfinished and recurrent work, as Robert Ginsberg would have it. I consciously use this device as a creative method and a theoretical strategy. My previous books always serve as a promise of the book-to-be-written.
I am grateful to the following publishers and journals for a gracious permission to reprint from the following works:


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Chapter 1

An Identity in Need of Assurance and Confirmation

Society can exist only if it penetrates the consciousness of individuals and fashions it in “its image and resemblance.”

—Émile Durkheim, On Morality and Society

Human Nature: Ever-Presence or Historical Achievement?


Whereas the vast majority of early modern philosophers had no doubts concerning the universality of human nature, regardless of differences among historical epochs, societies, their customs, and codes of chivalry, Giambattista Vico challenged this view by presenting, in La Scienza Nuova, human nature in terms of history, instead of nature in the strict sense. Nothing is obvious and clear here. For Vico, human nature becomes something of an achievement or accomplishment, instead of inheritance. Human nature moves from ascription to self-discovery and self-fulfillment. In this, Vico sounds strikingly modern and is easily recognizable to our intellectual, political, and moral sensibilities.

Human nature is unthinkable without history, or, to put it slightly differently, human nature does not exist beyond history. It is a
self-correcting and activating process of awareness and self-analysis rather than ever-presence. Human nature is therefore relocated from metaphysics to history and culture. Barbarity is part of human nature, and so is civilization. Yet however plausible and modern, Vico’s concept of human nature is but an extension of Count Giovanni Pico della Mirandola’s idea that humanity can make of itself whatever it likes precisely because God left humanity choice “to sink into a beast, and be born anew to the divine likeness,” as indicated in Pico’s speech on the dignity of humanity (cited in Burckhardt, 1990, 229).

Vico would not be capable of creating the New Science without philology broadly understood. For mundane experience and human life, history manifests itself as the totality of human practices, such as rituals, customs, and other forms of human interaction. It is impossible to trace history without dealing with the language because language contains all the forms of human change and history in the most inclusive sense, ranging from cosmology to the way in which we write poetry or philosophical treatises.

Describing philology as the study of historical cultures, and philosophy as the study of eternal ideas, Vico points out,

In my Science, philosophy undertakes to examine philology. (By philology I mean the science of everything that depends on human volition: for example, all histories of the languages, customs, and deeds of various peoples in both war and peace.) Previously, philosophy has had almost a horror of discussing questions of philology, since they involve lamentably obscure causes and infinitely diverse effects. But here philosophy reduces philology to the form of a science, discovering in it the outlines of an ideal eternal history, along which the histories of all nations pass in time. Viewed under this principal aspect, my New Science becomes a philosophy of human “authority”... And by discovering new principles of poetry, which in turn reveal new principles of mythology, I show that the Greek myths were true and rigorous histories of the customs of the most ancient peoples of Greece. (Vico, 1999, 5)

History is all about the change of human nature precisely because it is about the change of language itself. If our nature is disconnected from our language, images, imagination, powers of reasoning, and figures of speech, then it is but an empty record. Human nature simply does not exist beyond history. José Ortega y Gasset’s idea that humanity has no nature, for instead it has history, perfectly fits Vico’s idea of three kinds of human nature. In the New Science, we hear
the birth-cry of historicism as an extension of a modern idea of self-sufficiency of the human world.

History itself becomes an inescapable aspect of human nature and vice versa: The study of human nature moves from metaphysics to the new science, that of history and culture. Human nature changes over history. No human nature exists that would be granted by Nature or Providence to the human being once and for all. Here we can hear the early voice of historicism that later would range from Friedrich Schiller’s dictum (to be explicated by Hegel) proclaiming that “world history is the trial of the world” (die Weltgeschichte ist das Weltgericht), and Leopold von Ranke’s assertion, “every epoch has its relationship to God” (alle Epochen sind unmittelbar zu Gott), to Oswald Spengler’s distinction between the world-as-nature and the world-as-history, the first being ruled by causality and the second by irrational fate (Schicksal) (see Dooyeweerd, 1975).

Most important is Vico’s assumption that truth is a daughter of time (veritas filia temporis). We should search for truth in a flux of historical epochs and their great events rather than in the natural world created by God or in the history-free human world disconnected from flesh-and-blood human beings, their thoughts and deeds. Truth comes to us only through our study of history, that is, the civil world of nations. What manifests itself behind this idea is Renaissance Weltanschauung with its major emphasis on the human being as the sole creator of the human world, that world being incomplete and totally dependent on our ability to (re)shape it through the universal principles of human reason, creative endeavor, and artistic accomplishment. As Jacob Burckhardt noted, the biographies based on introspection, coupled with a profound self-analysis, reveal a powerful sense of history in the epoch of “the discovery of the world and of man” (see Burckhardt, 1990, 185–229).

Yet that fact remains that our individual grasp of reality and personal attitudes to life would be unthinkable without the use of concepts of the individual and reality that are always common. The tormenting duality of the body and the soul is far from a fantasy or a religious superstition. It deeply permeates human existence. In addition to it, another kind of duality exists, which links or opposes the way we represent the world to ourselves to that in which we represent ourselves to the world. The concepts we use and the terms we employ reflect a long history of human consciousness.

As Émile Durkheim points out, no articulation of human life and experience is possible without the use of these generic and common concepts, yet their internalization and actualization are deeply
personal and unique (see Durkheim, 1973, 149–63). Contrary to Vico’s historicism that led him to assume that three kinds of human nature exist, Durkheim’s concept of human nature rests on the painful contradiction and tension between two kinds of human nature: Our sensory being and its involvement in actions, in dreams and actions, in imagination and social practices. Crossing the boundaries of classical notions and transcending the limits of what we take as purely religious or philosophical concepts, Durkheim asserts that “the traditional antithesis of the body and soul is not a vain mythological concept that is without foundation in reality” (ibid., 154). Recalling Blaise Pascal’s formula that the human being is both “angel and beast,” we could sum it up by using another of Pascal’s phrases that each of us is a “monster of contradictions” (cited in ibid., 153–54). This is to say that, as Durkheim suggests, “we cannot follow one of our two natures without causing the other to suffer” (ibid., 154).

The way we perceive ourselves and the world around us can in fact be unique and highly individual, but the concepts in which we think or the language we speak represent the world and a long history of the human soul. We can act spontaneously and feel our unique validity due to our sensations, pain, anguish, disappointments, happiness, and so on; yet when it comes to concepts and terms, we map our lives, inscribe our names or engrave our existential and moral choices in the existing spiritual, intellectual, mental, and moral cartography of humanity. Like concepts and ideas, ideals are of holistic/collective nature. They precede our individual choices and spontaneous reactions that signify our coming into existence as individuals. The fusion of what had long existed before us and of the novelty and uniqueness of our reactions and choices makes our identity work.

Of ideals and their internalization, Durkheim writes,

But even while they are being individualized—and thus becoming elements of our personalities—collective ideals preserve their characteristic property: the prestige with which they are clothed. Although they are our own, they speak in us with a tone and an accent that are entirely different from those of our other states of consciousness. They command us; they impose respect on us; we do not feel ourselves to be on an even footing with them. We realize that they represent something within us that is superior to us. (ibid., 161)

Therefore, the way in which we identify and describe ourselves using the language is personal and impersonal, unique and common, modern and traditional, spontaneous and organized, individual and collective.
The same applies to our identity, which always is simultaneously dividing and associating, splitting and linking, exclusive and inclusive.

**Identity as a Burden, Adventure, and Game**

The ambivalence and duality permeate the theory and the practice of modern identity. As Zygmunt Bauman suggests, our infatuation with identity comes from the weakening and loosening of the sense of belonging. As Bauman points out,

*The idea of “identity” was born out of the crisis of belonging and out of the effort it triggered to bridge the gap between the “ought” and the “is” and to lift reality to the standards set by the idea—to remake the reality in the likeness of the idea … Identity could only enter the Lebenswelt as a task, as an as-yet-unfulfilled, unfinished task, a clarion call, a duty and an urge to act … Identity born as fiction needed a lot of coercing and convincing to harden and coagulate into a reality (more correctly: into the sole reality thinkable)—and the story of the birth and maturation of the modern state was overflown with both. (Bauman, 2004, 20)*

Not only does the idea of identity come to bridge the gap between the “ought” and the “is,” but it also serves as an attempt to reconcile and bridge what has been separated by modernity: Truth and value, rationality and tradition, expertise and social intimacy, the individual and community. The weaker our sense of belonging becomes, the stronger our inclination grows toward identity building, identity shifting, or identity forging. The ambivalence of identity is striking: While promising to grant you an independent existence as a unique, unchangeable, and irreplaceable individual, it also reserves and keeps you a safe niche in a community with which you, for one or another reason, identify stronger than with other communities or groups.

As a Lithuanian, I am also connected to one global community, in its special way concentrating and experiencing the whole world and its drama. A nation is a replica of such a global community. However, perhaps I would very much like to be British, Japanese, Chinese, or Jewish, but the road to these identities is an insurmountably difficult one—an illusion remains that language, faith, or social ritual will open the gates, but in reality, a part of our identity is inherited and a part is acquired during early socialization and participation in or joining to social ritual. Thus, our attempts to imitate or improvise other identities may deserve a curious glance or some derisive remarks but no more than that.
Those who have lived in foreign countries know very well how comic all the talk is about so-called sociocultural symmetry between life in our society and culture, and a foreign environment, which is purportedly guaranteed by contemporary transnationalism, thanks to the English language, the market, liberal democracy, and equal opportunities. No matter the degree of success of a single individual’s assimilation and professional career in a foreign country, such talk is naïve and resembles simple self-deception.

Within the sphere of our culture and the cultivation of our identity, there have never been, and there are no, absolutely open societies. As Bauman has reminded us, in modern society, instead, a balance or an imbalance of heterophilia and heterophobia exists, though an absolute majority of society’s members dream quietly about a community of similitude, for the sake of safety, where they would be surrounded by those similar to them, and where the necessity for delving into the lives of those who look and think differently would disappear.

But at this point, a complex question opens up. Modern identity is inevitably not only inherited but also more frequently consciously and freely constructed. And there is no sin in this. Not because this would be a sort of frivolous and irresponsible attitude toward one’s collective identity, culture, or surroundings, but only because in our world there are no more road signs. As Bauman has observed, we all inevitably are becoming more or less responsible for our identity, which, in our era, has gone from being an inheritable and learnable phenomenon to becoming a matter of choice and individual responsibility, and even an achievement to be proud of. In fact, the modern project did not liberate us from identity—on the contrary, it is becoming even more important and relevant than it was before. But the modern project, unfortunately, empowers us, or perhaps condemns us, to take care of it ourselves, not infrequently in a dramatic manner (see Bauman, 1996).

I might well raise one of the cursed questions of modernity over and over again—namely, who am I? In fact, who is the son of a Holocaust survivor whose father was a Jew yet whose mother happens to be half-Jewish and half-Polish? According to Israeli laws, I would not be identified as a Jew. Instead, I would pass for a Lithuanian with some Jewish connection. At the same time, the vast majority of Lithuanians regard me as a Jew, although I speak Lithuanian as my native language and was even educated as a philologist, majoring in the Lithuanian language and literature; only then, did I turn to the study of philosophy. Suffice it to say that I chose to be a Jew in the moral sense, which means that I am Lithuanian, yet I find myself Jewish whenever and wherever I encounter anti-Semitism, no matter in which guise it appears.
As a half-breed, I realize better than anybody else that established identities tend to be empty or tend to fall apart as a house of cards when confronted by what I would describe as being on the boundary of two or even several cultures and patterns of self-comprehension. Nobody will ever be able to define me, and only I, myself, can assume responsibility for my identity and handle it—this is precisely where the essence of my personal autonomy, freedom, vulnerability, and even curse, if you will, lies.

Once I no longer know where I belong and once no signs can guide me into the haven of certainty, safety and security, I need to build an identity. Thus, identity becomes an achievement. We have to qualify for the club: It is assumed in a nationalistic culture that you are supposed to merit your symbolic membership in the nation. If you are not an ethnic member of the nation, you have to pass an examination or else merit your certainty and safety. If you are not related to that particular nation by blood (the *jus sanguinis* logic and formula of citizenship) or if you were not born there (as the *jus soli* requires), a long and winding road awaits you ahead of your effort to join the body politic.

Those who were born in the country of our choice act with regard to us as those learned magistrates in Johann Valentin Andreae’s utopia, *Christianopolis*, examining a poor traveler and narrator who, having been shipwrecked, stands at the city gate asking to be let in. In *Christianopolis*, Andreae himself is required by three magistrates to take an entrance examination, after which he is allowed to enter the city, not because of his excellent performance on the test but because of his cleansing ordeal by shipwreck.

An immigrant, an exile, a refugee, a newcomer—in a way, they are all reduced to the newborn who is a clean canvas in terms of identity, and whose previous life and identity-building are, at best, of secondary importance for the receiving country. Things must have been better with educational utopias like Andreae’s *Christianopolis*, where the newcomer appeared as a storyteller and traveler, instead of a newborn.

Identity is also a set of economic and cultural accomplishments, for we, people from a boundary region in Europe known as Eastern Europe, are judged in the West on the grounds of our well-being at home, success or failure of our economy, our purchasing power, or the number of scholars or artists from our country that have become successful Americans, Brits, or West Europeans. For instance, a well-established and accomplished identity is tantamount to a successful curriculum vitae if we are an academic.
In addition, identity, in modern and multicultural society, manifests itself as a moral responsibility. The question arises here: Who is going to celebrate our military and political victories, our history, or mourn our victims of war crimes? Identity is also a memory regime, for we have a highly selective approach to history: We prize what others despise. When we politicize and otherwise mobilize our intimacy and sensitivity, identity may become even much of a political duty for those who try their utmost to make up a biography that would excite and deeply move a progressive and multicultural society. Obviously, identity can be made into a theory of social intimacy and distance or an interpretive framework for a gradual and continuous discovery of ourselves and social reality around us. Last but not least, identity can serve as a tool for social suicide or at least for dangerous liaisons and improvisations with our wish to live more than one life and to cast ourselves for more than one social role.

Moreover, identity becomes almost everything for a postmodern person who is an identity builder and an identity shifter par excellence. It is our raison d’être, a mode of discourse, self-discovery, self-interpretation, grasp of the world, and a perfect chance to reshape ourselves as the other in our own country. Identity protects and hurts us. Through an identity-building and identity-shifting process, I can move from political majority to cultural minority, or the other way around.

In Michelangelo Antonioni’s film, *Passenger* (1975), the main character, David Locke, is a journalist working in Africa. Desperately trying to find the way out of his professional and personal life, which he finds unbearably boring, dull, and predictable, he decides to assume the identity of a deceased businessman whose body he suddenly finds at a desert hotel in the middle of nowhere. The late businessman, with whom the journalist had spent an evening drinking and chatting, turns out to have been selling guns to a terrorist regime in Africa.

Having found himself in another man’s shoes and having spent another man’s days in Munich and Barcelona, the journalist does not find new hope and inspiration. On the contrary, he is entangled and trapped in his former temporary companion’s dangerous liaisons, as he is bound to live the life of an adventure seeker or of a concealed political radical without being able to build his own second life and biography. His project of the second life and identity fails because he is taken for another person and, having become a hostage of his unfortunate choice of identity, has to fight on behalf of and for someone else who no longer exists.

In one of the most memorable episodes from this film, the journalist’s girlfriend asks him why he left his home, family, profession, and all
of his previous life, assuming a false identity and living a ghostlike life of a deceased person. As they are on the road, he, instead of answering the question, suggests she look back over her shoulder. What she observes is a long and beautiful alley with nearly identical trees. A stunningly beautiful but unbearably orderly and predictable road becomes a metaphor of a safe and secure, yet meaningless and wasted, life.

People would be happy to assume another person’s identity for the sake of riches, like the poor Tom Canty, a Prince Edward look-alike from Mark Twain’s novel *The Prince and the Pauper*, who, having exchanged his cloths with Prince Edward, Henry VIII’s son, for fun, unexpectedly becomes Edward VI. Other people would gladly assume another identity out of their wish to get more power and prestige. We can easily imagine people who would attempt to build another identity to get more safety and security.

Antonioni’s magnificent film shows us something radically different: A safe and secure individual, a well-established and highly regarded professional decides to end his life by disappearing and living the life of another person out of his sincere want of unsafety and insecurity. Yet the tragedy is that assuming another man’s identity and committing a social suicide does not help much: The journalist fails to find independence and freedom because he becomes dependent on someone else’s biography, felonies, and misdemeanors. He cannot get away with another person’s life, for no empty and insignificant life exists. Another person’s life reckons with him, chases after him, and his identity confines the main character of the film to the worst-case-scenario—the former journalist is bound to spend the rest of his time hiding and desperately trying to prolong his life, as if a mere and pointless continuation of his life were his dream. An unlived life becomes a burden and fiction.

If I have good reason to dislike mainstream politics or major political parties of a given country, nothing can prevent me from retreating into a cultural minority group or any other community of historical memory. Identity serves as an invitation both to the past and to the future. In addition, identity is a more or less safe retreat from present culture wars and partisan politics. For instance, if I happen to be a foreigner or a legal alien in a country where I work, I do not belong there, and therefore, I cannot assume responsibility for the encounters of local competing memories or ideological clashes.

Being unable to make up my mind about which side I have to be on, I always have a way to conceal part of my personality, switching to identity games. Religion, no matter whether it is moderate or militant, offers and lends itself to those who find themselves unable to cope with
the challenges of secular public morality and the burden of individual responsibility. More than that, identity seems to increasingly become a personal secret, a family or background legend, and a license to engage in political radicalism. In fact, the term “troubled identity,” if taken not as a metaphor but as a strict term, that is, without any interpretive context, would sound a bit like a pleonasm, for no other form of identity exists in the modern world. The shifting identity is always troubled, and the troubled identity is always shifting.

Of identity as a phenomenon, as indispensable, as unclear, and as all-pervasive as vague and unfathomable, Samuel P. Huntington writes,

The “concept of identity,” it has been said, “is as indispensable as it is unclear.” It “is manifold, hard to define and evades many ordinary methods of measurement.” The twentieth century’s leading scholar of identity, Erik Erikson, termed the concept “all-pervasive” but also “vague” and “unfathomable.” The infuriating inescapability of identity is well demonstrated in the work of the distinguished social theorist Leon Wieseltier. In 1996, he published a book, Against Identity, denouncing and ridiculing the fascination of intellectuals with that concept. In 1998, he published another book, Kaddish, an eloquent, passionate, and explicit affirmation of his own Jewish identity. Identity, it appears, is like sin, however much we oppose it, we cannot escape it. (Huntington, 2005, 21)

Identity is what allows you to possess history or to own a historical narrative. You can claim your exclusive rights as a storyteller, a symbolic transmission belt that bridges the past and the future by transmitting tradition, or a member of an imagined community, insofar as you engage in identity building or identity upholding. Therefore, identity serves as a passport to a self-legitimizing narrative of a nation, a community, or a group. It allows room and even encourages proselytizing and ideological conversion. In doing so, identity replaces all agents of cultural determinism, such as biology, race, color, or social class, all of them being conceived of as destiny. No destiny exists for identity, which is a mobile destiny of the modern world.

Is Our Life as Shaky as the Fiddler on the Roof?

Yet duality, as has been noticed by major modern philosophers and sociologists, permeates our human nature, since one part of it is beyond our reach and control, whereas another part is made up by us.
Being determined by our existential and moral choices, this mobile part of our identity becomes another facet of our nature, manifesting itself as a set of our accomplishments and achievements. We could safely assume that up to the nineteenth century theorists were inclined to see that unchangeable part of the human nature as essential. A paradigm shift in social philosophy and sociology signified an identity shift toward the mobile or changeable part of the human nature.

In his political treatise, *Idea of a Universal History from a Cosmopolitan Point of View* (1784), Immanuel Kant noticed that the human nature is contradictory and split, that discrepancy exists between different faculties of the human soul, which creates mutual antagonism in society, and that the best name for this antagonism would be the “unsocial sociability.” We are longing for creative solitude and individual self-fulfillment, which is always limited and restricted by our social milieu and society at large; yet another part of our self is inseparable from society, its norms, social recognition, and the sense of fellowship.

Of this antagonism, Kant writes,

The means which nature employs to bring about the development of all the capacities implanted in men is their mutual antagonism in society, but only so far as this antagonism becomes at length the cause of an order among them that is regulated by law ... By this antagonism I mean the unsocial sociability of men; that is, their tendency to enter into society, conjoined, however, with an accompanying resistance which continually threatens to dissolve this society. The disposition for this manifestly lies in human nature. Man has an inclination to socialize himself by associating with others, because in such a state he feels himself more than a natural man, in the development of his natural capacities. He has, moreover, a great tendency to individualize himself by isolation from others, because he likewise finds in himself the unsocial disposition of wishing to direct everything merely according to his own mind; and hence he expects resistance everywhere, just as he knows with regard to himself that he is inclined on his part to resist others. Now it is this resistance or mutual antagonism that awakens all the powers of men, that drives him to overcome all his propensity to indolence, and that impels him, through the desire of honor or power or wealth, to strive after rank among his fellow men—whom he can neither bear to interfere with himself, nor yet let alone. Then the first real steps are taken from the rudeness of barbarism to the culture of civilization, which particularly lies in the social worth of man. (cited in Gardiner, 1959, 25–26; my emphasis)

Whereas one part of our identity motivates us to keep away from society, another part calls for going there to be identified, recognized,
appreciated, and befriended (or envied, despised, and hated, which also allows us a path to relationship and social existence). We are able to hold in ourselves two mutually exclusive attitudes to society, exclusive and inclusive, individualistic and holistic, each of them granting us the way of existence. It is difficult to define identity better and more precise than Kant did it without using the term. Having an identity allows us to be identified as a unique individual, a family member, a human being with his or her unique existential experience and validity, a social class member, and a member or representative of the nation.

As mentioned, Durkheim stressed the duality of identity as well. Partly echoing Kant, Durkheim asserts that every modern individual is *homo duplex* due to the dual character of the need for identity. This duality springs from our want to be accepted into a community and its culture through concepts that our minds communicate. By no means does the assuming of collective identity or participating in social ritual prevent us from having an individual and uniquely valid identity. As Durkheim notes,

> Because they are held in common, concepts are the supreme instrument of all intellectual exchange. By means of them minds communicate. Doubtless, when one thinks through the concepts that he receives from the community, he individualizes them and marks them with his personal imprint, but there is nothing personal that is not susceptible to this type of individualization … These two aspects of our psychic life are … opposed to each other as are the personal and the impersonal … The old formula *homo duplex* is therefore verified by the facts. Far from being simple, our inner life has something that is like a double center of gravity. On the one hand is our individuality—and, more particularly, our body in which it is based … on the other is everything in us that expresses something other than ourselves. (Durkheim, 1973, 152)

The ambivalence of identity lies in the fact that we would never know what and when leads people to celebrate their identity. On the one hand, it could be a dream of being identified as a member of a nation internationally credited for its economic success or its fight for independence; on the other hand, identity could be used with much success to underline the uniqueness of a particular individual who wishes not to be associated with or attached to anything. Therefore, identity can serve equally well as the transmission belt or as the emergency exit.

The phrase “identity crisis” sounds like a pleonasm, since no identity exists that would not be in crisis. An intense search for an identity
is a symptom of crisis. Identity itself is a crisis of tradition. A frantic search for identity, rather than an attempt at self-comprehension, self-articulation, or self-reflection, signifies no more and no less than the crisis of a particular individual and his or her personality, of a social group, or of a society at large. Our search for identity, as well as our propensity to engage in identity shifting, is a sign of uncertainty, unsafety, and insecurity. Failing to successfully establish ourselves at home, we try to do it elsewhere. Finding no understanding or consolation in our hometown, we move to another town establishing our new legend or story of how we cherish the spirit and tradition of that newly found town. The search for identity is an internal migration process, which culminates in the individual’s departure from modern life. This usually happens by choosing a militant religion, an antimonodern ideology, or a hate group.

Today, we are accustomed to beating the drums of supposed danger against what appears as the unavoidable outcome of globalization. Are we Europeans losing our shared historical and civilizational identity? Is Europe at the peril of losing its core values and cultural identity? Does a modern, liberal-democratic, and multicultural society have the ability to uphold its cohesion without succumbing to atomization and fragmentation? Does a blueprint for an open society go hand in hand with an ability to sustain a set of historically formed ideas, culturally shaped values, and collective sentiments that we take as identity? Did Europe abandon itself by adopting a blueprint for a social and moral order that does not support its core values anymore? Are we facing the breakdown of the world that we once knew as Europe?

Some of these questions have their theoretical rationale; yet others appear as a political fantasy fueled by our troubled identity. In fact, our identity needs an assurance and confirmation. There was a time when being a European was as easily shared and understood as playing a concerto grosso composed by an Italian and performed by a Viennese chamber orchestra conducted by a German or portraying an English aristocrat by a German or Flemish master. Those times are long gone. Now being a European is part of the political agenda. Being a European increasingly tends to become a political manifesto, a matter of politically mobilized identity, and an expression of what I would describe as the politicized moral sentiment or the politically tuned and exposed sphere of human intimacy.

We have to spell out and cry out who we are as if it were a matter of utmost moral loyalty or high treason. We are not at peace with our sense of belonging, which is placed in jeopardy. Being constantly questioned about our loyalty and even pushed to the limit where we
have to endorse the elusive set of attitudes and views just to assume certainty, safety, and security, and being unable to get away, in this troubled world, with our sense of shared memory and sentiment as a dweller of a city, town, or region, we successfully pass an examination to qualify for becoming a European, a Westerner, or a Civilized Person. Having failed to endorse that set, we may slide into a resistance identity that allows us to raise the voice against modernity and its unbearable burden of ambivalence and uncertainty.

In the modern world, identity increasingly tends to become a passphrase to real or imagined solidarity, a political and moral examination, a mask that we wear to conceal our uncertainties and worries, and an achievement that we celebrate as nearly a mystical unity of the individual and their community. Thus, a well-publicized interracial marriage or an adoption of a child of different race becomes a political statement, rather than an act of love, compassion, and human intimacy.

The same applies to the fierce defenders of identities based on the blood-and-soil type of symbolic logic and moral culture. They speak up in favor of the distribution of power and prestige on the grounds of ethnicity or the Heideggerian “mythopoetic substance,” rather than human fellowship and solidarity. Last but not least, this is the world that incites and invites the new type of religiosity, something like politicized religion where wearing religious symbols is no longer an innocent detail of private life and silent devotion; instead, it becomes a war cry or a military uniform. Some political scientists, perhaps, would gladly use the adjective “civilizational,” which is tantamount to “militant” or “military” nowadays.

Are we losing our Tradition, this haven of certainty, safety, and security? Does it slip away robbing us of our sense of pride and belonging? Does it vanish in the air leaving no trace around us? If we are not to conflate Identity and Tradition, we have to admit that Identity relates to Tradition as Civilization to Culture in Oswald Spengler’s gloomy prophecy, *The Decline of the West*. Spengler notes that the epoch of culture is able to create masterpieces of art and great treatises of philosophy without engaging in the analysis of every single episode from social life or without asking questions about the meaning of art and culture, whereas the epoch is civilization is devoid of any authentic form of art or philosophy; yet it has the striking powers of analysis and interpretation.

Much in tune with Spengler, we could assert that Tradition is what is taken for granted, what makes the world, and what allows us to paint, to compose, to write, and to pray without asking the cursed questions, such as “Who am I?” and “Why am I here, and not there?”
Tradition is creative and Identity, interpretive. Identity is the end of life cycle, a sign of exhaustion, the kiss of death on Tradition, and a symptom of our inability to accept the world as it is.

Our reliance on Tradition without being able to explain what it is makes us sound like Tevye the milkman from Sholom Aleichem’s collection of short stories, *Tevye and His Daughters*, later the main character in the famous stage musical *Fiddler on the Roof* and in its film adaptation, who is certain that only Tradition can keep the Jews going in this world without being able to explain why, how, and for how long this would happen. Finally, Tevye finds himself unable to put this in words and explain what the Tradition is. He just feels it. Without Tradition, assumes Tevye, our life would be as shaky as that of the fiddler on the roof.

The irony is that Jewish tradition, as we learn from Tevye’s life, has already become the fiddler on the roof. What is left of it is just common destiny of being a target of irrational hatred. Tevye’s daughters marry three men who represent three trajectories of the fate of the Jews in the modern world. One daughter marries a deeply traditional Jew, a poor and hard-working tailor who desperately tries to make ends meet; the second daughter marries a revolutionary, secularist, and modernist; and the third one marries a gentile. No less ironic is that the great Ukrainian-Jewish writer Solomon Rabinowitch wrote under the pseudonym Sholom Aleichem, since, at that time, Yiddish was considered “déclassé,” and Rabinowitch wanted to keep his identity a secret.

Do we need the Tradition so strongly now as we did earlier? And do we need the cultural canon in our age of encounter and discovery of multiple traditions, identities, and canon? Is our life without them as shaky as of the fiddler on the roof?

**Cultural Canon: Protective Armor? Self-Examination? Self-Discovery?**

In a way, this is true of the infatuation with the cultural canon, if we take it as a protective armor of our troubled identity, instead of perceiving it as a bridge between tradition and modernity or between classical and modern sensibilities. We try to restore or rediscover the cultural canon in the hope that it would protect us from the unbearable uncertainties and ambiguities of liquid modernity, to use Zygmunt Bauman’s term.

Yet the question arises: What is the canon? The cultural canon hardly is a recent invention. We could recall the debate that took
place in the sixteenth century, which we know as the debate between the Ancients and the Moderns. We know that in the Renaissance two groups of scholars existed. The first one, the scholars belonging to the camp of Ancients, that is, philosophers and philologists who never reached for anything beyond their Greek or Roman counterparts, held that virtue and a higher standard of education lay in Ancient Greece and Rome. Yet the other group, Moderns, argued that whatever our appreciation and our great fascination with Classical Antiquity, the modern sciences easily surpass it in their ability to transform reality beyond recognition, knowledge of mathematics, physics, and modern referential knowledge.

Some scholars, such as Niccolò Machiavelli in his *Discourses on Livy*, or Sir Francis Bacon, actually provided many interesting insights concerning this tension between Classical Antiquity, for which they had much admiration, and modernity. They held the first debate concerning the nature of the canon. And this allows us to think that the canon originates with the tension between tradition and modern interpretation: This tradition and its discovery. We know that this continued for some time.

In the seventeenth century, Charles Perrault, a French philosopher whom we know better as an anthologist of fairy tales, and the English philosopher Sir Francis Bacon wrote about this tension between Classical Antiquity and the Modern era, rehabilitating the latter and putting the idea of its misery vis-à-vis Classical Antiquity into question. However, David Hume in the eighteenth century, in his *Natural History of Religion*, still argued that the pagan religions were more tolerant than the monotheist ethos, which characterized Christianity (see Hume, 1956, 1985). Here again, we had this tension: What was better? What was more prominent? Classical Antiquity, that is, the pagan world, which was quite tolerant and quite inclusive, or the Modern era, Christianity, and its great achievements in science and culture?

To describe the canon as a sort of “ever-presence” or as a collection of rules or standards is the last thing I would do; nor would I define it as a collection of texts that have to be reinterpreted each time we discover them or each time we include them in our curricula. Instead, I would describe the canon as a dramatic debate and a crossroads where tradition meets modernity, where modern interpretation can rediscover or reinterpret some important texts.

Instead of being a matter of ascription, the canon is a discovery of a form of life and creativity. What is behind the canon is a unifying language of art and style, which permeates culture and historical epochs. In addition, the cultural canon fosters a mode of aesthetic
sensitivity that bridges societies, their traditions, and ways in which they grasp reality. Therefore, the canon is likely to serve as an interpretive framework within which we identify ourselves and the world, rather than as a ready-made mode of the assurance and confirmation of our identity.

Having said this, we have to add that this does not prevent us from understanding the canon as the discovery of universalistic systems of thought and action; it can be easily thought of as a paradigm in the arts and sciences, as well as in philology. Finally, I cannot imagine the canon without *studia humanitatis*, or without the great inventions of the Florentine humanists, which allowed people to share their knowledge of Europe, and of the Middle East, as well as of the great non-European cultures.

When we think about Europe’s cultural canon, instead of measuring swords when it comes to the composition of the European cultural canon, all we need to do is remind ourselves of the European canon as it was and as it has continued to grow up to our day. For instance, my argument is made quite simple when I think about the epoch of the Renaissance—the embodiment of this European relationship and the core of European intellectual interplay lies with people like Erasmus and Thomas More: One, a Dutchman, the other, an Englishman, and what brought them together in Paris was an admiration for Lucian, a Greek writer whom they translated into Latin.

And that was how their friendship started. They began sharing important insights; we know that Erasmus’s *Praise of Folly* was nothing but a play on words: *Moria* as folly but also a play on More, a subtle dedication to Thomas More. This friendship led to the emergence of talented people like Hans Holbein the Younger, who was discovered by Erasmus and then introduced to Thomas More, which led to him making his fortune and reputation in England as a painter at the Royal Court. Who cared that one of them was Dutch and the other English and that they shared admiration for a great writer? That was how it went. That was the point. And this tells us something about how humanism and universalism are absolutely indispensible prerequisites for the European canon because the canon can be understood as a dialogue or as a very intense dialogue between tradition and modernity.

The canon originates in the discovery of what was an anticipation of a modern language. We know that Frans Hals or his great followers, such as Judith Leyster, were discovered by French art critics and painters for a very simple reason: They understood that Hals and his school invented loose brushwork as well as a good part of the modern language
of visual arts, an aesthetic language that was to become accepted and even widespread in the nineteenth century.

They anticipated what was to become a modern aesthetic language or idiom in the nineteenth century. That was the reason Claude Monet and other great French impressionists held that their masters were the great Dutch masters. And this was the reason they were discovered. Another example that underscores how the cultural canon works is William Shakespeare, a classical story. Rumors about Shakespeare were that no one believed an actor was able to compose or to write such fine tragedies. Many versions of these rumors supported those speculations: That Sir Francis Bacon or Christopher Marlowe was Shakespeare’s ghostwriter. Few took Shakespeare seriously. Even in nineteenth-century Victorian England, people were still tempted to doubt whether a man not affiliated with Cambridge or Oxford would have been able to compose such masterpieces.

Who made Shakespeare a great standard-bearer then? It was the Germans Johann Wolfgang von Goethe and Friedrich Schiller of the *Sturm und Drang* (Storm and Stress) movement. It was not the French who were skeptical or ambiguous about Shakespeare. Voltaire had some admiration for Shakespeare, but then again Voltaire was skeptical about form: About Shakespeare’s supposed inability to distinguish between comedy and tragedy. And the same was true with Molière. But somehow it was with Goethe and Schiller that Shakespeare became Europe’s and literature’s great standard-bearer. Therefore, within Shakespeare, a European project exists. He became the greatest writer because of this creative interplay of cultures.

We could continue providing similar facts. French art critics in the nineteenth century rediscovered Johannes Vermeer, precisely because they understood that his was an incredible artistic language. It is difficult to describe the European canon in any other way than *European*, in the deepest sense of this word. Can we imagine Rembrandt or Bartholomeus van der Helst without Caravaggio and the Dutch movement of the Caravaggisti? Or without *chiaroscuro*, the painting technique revealing the light *di sotto in su* (up from under) and similar techniques of artistic delivery or devices that came from Italy? Again, these are profoundly European things. The same logic of the interplay of cultures holds for early Renaissance Italy, itself a recipient, in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, of the expressive qualities of northern, especially Netherlandish, “portraits and devotional images that attracted the Florentines” (Aikema, 2007, 105).

Anthony van Dyck is another example. Without Van Dyck, we could not imagine Europe—namely, people who belong at least to
several cultures. Van Dyck spoke Dutch, Italian, Spanish, and English and spent much of his time in England with Charles I and became the royal household’s finest painter. And there is no question that Van Dyck laid the foundations for English portrait painting because even Sir Joshua Reynolds and Thomas Gainsborough in the eighteenth century regarded themselves as his disciples. Obviously, he belongs to several plains of creative work. The same could be said about George Frederic Handel in music. Handel in Italy and England, yet Händel in Germany—each plane of his artistic and political existence would allow us to talk about him as a great influence.

An eminent film director, Sergei Parajanov, who lived in the former Soviet Union, could be another great example of the canon as a continuing rediscovery of self in the world of multiple identities and as a shared space of cultural identity. He was born into Armenian family in Tbilisi, Georgia, and spent much time in Ukraine and Georgia, finally settling in Armenia. He spoke several languages, and all of these countries regard him as having been one of their own. Incidentally, that was a time when it was possible to play the ethnocultural identity card, precisely because the Soviets started allowing such minor identity games. Parajanov went to Ukraine and made a magnificent film, The Shadows of the Forgotten Ancestors, which is regarded as a classic in Ukraine, and the Ukrainians acknowledged the film as a significant part of their national rebirth movement.

That was how a person made himself up while acting in several cultures, all of which were involved in a dialogue that was intertwined, constant, and that had multiple strands. Parajanov achieved international fame and professional credit after the triumph of his movie The Color of the Pomegranates. The film was about the life of Sayat Nova, a great medieval poet of Armenian origin who lived in Georgia, and who wrote in Armenian, Georgian, Persian, and Azerbaijani Turkish. The greatest folk singer-songwriter that ever lived in the Caucasus, Sayat Nova would be unthinkable without the context of several languages and cultures.

The cultural canon as it stands today is impossible to squeeze into a single culture. The ability to place something exclusively in one culture means that we have merely a political invention or a political project masquerading as culture. And one more point should be made concerning the way in which the canon could be “seeded,” that is, by placing to one side those things that are absolutely obvious, and which we take as a great continuation of European spiritual and intellectual process. We know that some things are politically planted.
If we speak of a European canon, we cannot treat it as something distant from us; nor does it make sense to define it as something that has to be celebrated and mobilized. In fact, the European interplay of epics, cultures, and languages is exactly what Europe is and has always been about.

**Tradition: Hierarchy versus Individualism**

The concept of tradition as a transmitted program of thought and action, that engraves our collective memory and identity with the historically formed and examined ways of grasping reality, has been challenged by theorists of nationalism who argued that tradition is a characteristically modern invention and infatuation.

Along with Bauman, who provides a most incisive and sensitive analysis of the modern condition and postmodern existential situations, Louis Dumont could be recalled as a civilizational analyst, who judges modernity and its profoundly problematic facets from premodern premises. Although Dumont had become a major influence and inspiration for the New Right in France, his insights into the origins of modern hatred shed more light on antimodernism than the vast majority of mainstream progressive social theories.

Most telling is Dumont’s hint that he explores the symbolic organization of modern Western individualism: Modernity departs from what Dumont takes as civilizationally normal condition. Hierarchy is the controlling principle of traditional societies, whereas individualism is the substance of the symbolic framework within which modern civilization becomes possible (see Kavolis, 1995; Donskis 2000).

Yet individualism, as Dumont suggests, is too weak and problematic a basis for the foundations of societal existence. By ignoring the fundamentally holistic/hierarchic nature of society, modern individualism makes our present Western condition extremely vulnerable and fragile. According to him, modern totalitarianism, racism, anti-Semitism, and xenophobia must all be understood as reactions to the fundamental denial of the holistic nature of society, the persistent denial that marked the past centuries of Western history. To celebrate this history is the last thing Dumont would do: It is not modernity that is normal, and the traditional, premodern condition that is abnormal but the other way around. Hence, an implication can be drawn from his theory concerning the origins of modern collective hatred—the implication that modern collective hatred can be analyzed as a compensatory phenomenon, a desperate voice of the suppressed need for hierarchy and holism.
Dumont judges modernity from premodern premises. A historicized Durkheimian, a successor to the French holistic tradition in sociology, and a disciple of Marcel Mauss, Dumont takes hierarchy as the controlling principle of all traditional societies and civilizations. According to him, Europeans and Westerners, with their thought deeply entrenched in individualism both as a controlling principle of modern civilization and as a methodological principle, are unable to grasp hierarchy otherwise than through the lenses of political power. We are inclined to perceive hierarchy as a rigid and unshakable pyramid of power, whereas any Indian or Japanese would stress the powers to embrace a social whole and the ability to encompass the opposite as intrinsic and genuine traits of hierarchy.

Whatever the case, it is not us, nominalists and individualists, who should be described as civilizationally normal and traditional societies abnormal, but the other way around. In approaching and judging the rest of the world from the perspective at which we, thinking historically, have arrived so recently, we violate what has been tested and proved by social reality itself. In doing so, we at the peril of remaining a tiny and fragile, albeit economically and politically powerful, minority reproaching and judging the world for what has always been at the core of social and political existence. A part cannot judge the whole, for our modern history, regardless of its revolutionizing thought and social effects, is just a footnote in world history. Therefore, our modern history is a history of the abandoning of, and departing from, tradition.

To be able to understand why and how hierarchy works, Westerners have to go to India. The same holds for Indians who, for their part, have to go to the West if they want to get authentic understanding of individualism at work (see Dumont, 1970, 1980). Both hierarchy and individualism have their roots in religion. To decipher their symbolic codes, Dumont works out a truly cross- and interdisciplinary theoretical strategy: While operating as a student of Indian civilization, he works as an anthropologist; yet when he turns to modern Europe, he immediately changes his analytical tools and becomes a structural historian of ideas and political philosopher.

In his early works on the caste system, its implications, and Indian civilization in general, Dumont focused on hierarchy as the essence of traditional or holistic societies. In the West, according to Dumont, hierarchy is a neglected, if not completely lost, concept because it is constantly misinterpreted and misrepresented as a phenomenon of oppression or as just another term for the pyramid of power. In fact, suggests Dumont, it has nothing to do with political power; nor does it spring from the imposition of someone’s will on a social whole.
Hierarchy is a moral ideology rather than a system of political or economic power, which seeks to preserve the ideal of purity. At the same time, hierarchy manifests as a method for upholding a social whole as such.

Hence the principle of hierarchical complementarity, whose essence lies in the encompassing of the contrary. Hierarchy is the controlling principle of Indian civilization; moreover, hierarchy, or some element of it, is at the core of all traditional societies. At this point, the modern civilization of the West, which rests on individualism/equality as its controlling principle, challenges and departs from what is considered by Dumont as civilizationally “normal” conditions. Not tradition but modernity is “abnormal” in world history: “Modern civilization differs radically from other civilizations and cultures. The truth is that our culture is permeated by nominalism, which grants real existence only to individuals and not to relations, to elements and not to sets of elements” (Dumont, 1986, 11).

In societal life, two dimensions always exist—those of social theory/ideology and social practice/power, the former being prior and superior to the latter. Ideology relates to power as the encompassing to the encompassed. This is the hierarchic form of relation between complementary opposites, the encompassing being “the more conscious” and the encompassed “the less conscious aspects of the social whole” (Dumont, 1970, 165; see Dumont, 1980). When power starts subordinating and dominating ideology, the division of functions in a given civilization turns upside down. In Dumont’s view, this is exactly what happened to modern Western civilization.

From its inception, individualism has been a religious phenomenon. It is not accidental that Dumont recalls Ernst Troeltsch as saying, “it follows from Christ’s and then Paul’s teaching that the Christian is an ‘individual-in-relation-to-God,’” and “there is … ‘absolute individualism and absolute universalism’ in relation to God.” Dumont’s insights into the nature of individualism throw new light on Christian civilization as a religiously individualistic phenomenon: “The individual soul receives eternal value from its filial relationship to God, in which relationship is also grounded human fellowship: Christians meet in Christ, whose members they are” (Dumont, 1986, 29–30). Human beings are individuals insofar as they are facing God. This is to say that the individual comes into being as the otherworldly individual.

Even in modern times, suggests Dumont, it is still possible to find some traces of this paradigmatic individualism. With sound reason, Dumont reinterprets Alexis de Tocqueville’s *Democracy in America*,
where he witnesses the continuity of the civilizationally “normal,”
that is, a hierarchic framework within which individualism manifests
itself as the controlling principle and as ideology, prior and superior
to social practice and power. According to Dumont, individualism in
nineteenth-century America was possible and even morally viable inasmuch as Americans, while releasing an all-embracing individualistic energy in their economic and political activities, on the inferior level, submitted to God in religion, on the superior level. So the model of the strict separation of ideology/faith and power—the American phenomenon that so much struck and fascinated Tocqueville—still worked in nineteenth-century America.

Yet an initial inversion of this model took place in the middle of the eighth century when the Popes assumed the right to crown kings. The fusion of ideology and power, which Dumont qualifies as a “perversion” of hierarchy in Christian civilization (the confusion of spiritual values with secular power), culminates in the Reformation. The innerworldly individual comes to replace the otherworldly one. Individualism ceases functioning as the spiritual principle and transforms into a mere instrument of power. European history was essentially driven by the tension between the ideologies of hierarchy and individualism, the latter being perceived by Dumont as just another name for the modern ideology.

In the world of individualism, tradition no longer serves as an identity-supplying and upholding force. Instead, it becomes obsolete and tends to be relegated to the margins of social theory and practice. However, things are far from simple and obvious with individualism as well. It makes no sense to talk about a single and all-embracing ideology of individualism, since we encounter in reality the opposed and even mutually exclusive versions of individualism or individualisms in the plural. Dumont analyzes two major versions of individualism, namely, the French national variant of individualism and the German one, or extravert and introvert varieties of individualism.

As Dumont describes this, the essence of the French version of individualism lies in the assumption that I am a human being by nature and French by accident, whereas a German would assert that he or she is essentially German and that he or she merits the name of the human being through her or his being a German (“J’ai ainsi contrasté le Français: ‘Je suis homme par nature et français par accident,’ et l’Allemand: ‘Je suis essentiellement un Allemand, et je suis un homme grâce à ma qualité d’Allemand’ … ”; see Donskis, 2000, 147).

In his *Essays on Individualism: Modern Ideology in Anthropological Perspective*, Dumont discovers Thomas Mann as saying that
the German Reformation immunized the Germans against social and political revolution. In their indifference, not to say hostility, to social reality, German intellectuals stand close to Martin Luther whose spiritual and intellectual successors they are (see Dumont, 1986, 140–41). With good reason, Dumont describes the German identity formula as “self-dedication + Bildung,” the formula fostered by the German middle-class intelligentsia (ibid., 146).

It sheds new light on why and how German intellectuals failed to properly and immediately react to evil forces in their society, like those of National Socialism. Evil had to be fought in the soul, or in the inner reality, rather than in the world of public affairs, or the outer reality.

**Culture, Identity, and the Collective Individual**

The eminent German sociologist Norbert Elias, in *The Civilizing Process*, a brilliant theoretical study analyzing the impact of etiquette and manners on individual self-control and on the emergence of the modern state, uncovered the sociogenesis of the concepts *Kultur* and *Zivilisation*. More precisely, Elias traced the sociogenesis and psychogenesis of the distinction between the two concepts and the corresponding terms. Anglo American and French-speaking scholars have always tended to use these terms as synonyms. The appearance of a sharp dividing line between them seems a specifically German phenomenon deeply embedded in *Geschichtsphilosophie* and *Kulturphilosophie*, subsequently reinterpreted within Central/East European philosophies of history and culture under the influence of German social philosophy.

Elias, in his surgical analysis of the social processes that brought about the distinction between *Kultur* and *Zivilisation*, provided a discursive map of how the culturally predominant social group contrives to identify itself with the whole people. According to Elias, the German middle-class intelligentsia, at the end of the eighteenth century, had come to define and identify itself through the concepts *Kultur* and *Bildung* as contrasted to the specifically French concept *Civilisation*, which had become merely a symbolic reference to German court aristocracy—pro-French and contemptuous of the German language and literature (see Elias, 1994, 3–28).

For the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century German middle-class intelligentsia, politically insignificant and even impotent within the nearly feudal structure of social hierarchy and political power, *Kultur* and *Bildung* began to refer to *das rein Geistige* (the purely spiritual),
that is, the realm of pure spirituality/self-cultivation, and to a notion of creative genius consciously disconnected from the sphere of economic and political power. *Civilisation*, by contrast, was perceived by them as the very essence of artificiality, superficiality, banality, moral corruption, and empty conventional politeness so characteristic of the court aristocracy and their stances.

Elias succeeded in uncovering further implications for analyzing the development of these concepts as well as for collective identities (his hypothesis reveals an important anatomy of the birth of group stereotyping). The German middle-class intelligentsia eventually contrived to generalize its collective identity to cover the entire German people. The latter was interpreted through the concepts *Kultur* and *Bildung*, while *Civilisation* was transformed by them into an interpretive framework within which the entire French people could be defined and identified. The Germans, within such a framework, turned out to be en bloc thoughtful, spiritual, sincere, and honest, while the French were depicted as hopelessly pompous, pretentious, superficial, and hypocritical.

Thus, Elias puts forward and contextualizes the sociological premise that the modern nation-state, as a conjunction between a polity and a shared culture, is nothing but a politicocultural construct of the new kind of egalitarian elite. Another key implication of his conception is even more striking: The intelligentsia comes to constitute itself only by virtue of the definition and identification of something that stands behind it, namely, an imagined community and a forged common culture. This is the way that intellectuals come into existence as an agency of consciousness bridging the principle of imagination and the principle of reality. Last but not least, Elias implies that intellectuals as a group are always searching for an enemy, no matter whether imaginary or real to define themselves and experience their collective identity.

Elias further shows how those intellectuals who orchestrated the *Sturm und Drang* movement came to enlarge the concepts of *Kultur* and *Bildung* to constitute a symbolic framework within which by the German people could eventually replace writers, philosophers, composers, artists, and university scholars as the bearers of virtue, talent, creative genius, honesty, simplicity, and authenticity. Analogously, the concept *Civilisation* develops into an alternative symbolic framework within which the entire French people replace the German court aristocracy as the bearers of all possible vices, including alleged intellectual and creative limitations. Therefore, Elias provides, along with his other insights into the contrasting models of collective self-understanding, an
analytically incisive discursive map of nationalism, that is, the socio-
genesis and psychogenesis of the concept *Volk*.

As mentioned, Goethe and Schiller, both the principal driving force
behind the *Sturm und Drang*, raised the name of William Shakespeare
as a banner precisely because they identified Friedrich the Great’s
disdain for Shakespeare as parroting of his mentor in philosophy,
Voltaire. Voltaire was the first who described Shakespeare as an
English barbarian incapable of the sense of form, and only then did his
kingly Prussian disciple repeat this pearl of wisdom, also adding that
he was deeply sorry for those young German writers who admired
that English barbarian in whose plays the language of kings did not
differ from that of gravediggers. Something had to be done to work
out a strategy opposed to French Classicism with its rigid divisions of
genres and forms of art.

At the same time, an antidote had to be offered to the emperor who
was full of contempt for the German language as a crude language of
barbarians supposedly capable only of crude expressions and related
to crude manners. Molière was also recalled as having suggested that
Shakespeare was simply unable to distinguish between comedy and
tragedy. And since the French cultural standards and aesthetic criteria
had to be dismissed, Shakespeare’s name eventually became a war cry,
a banner, and an opposing program. Shakespeare owes to the *Sturm
and Drang* his reputation of a modern genius who moved beyond
conventional forms of literature and established his own pattern of
literary genres.

*Zivilisation*, *Kultur*, and *Bildung* provided an interpretive frame-
work for a modern German identity as something self-asserting,
self-sufficient, unique, and different from French aristocratic and uni-
versalistic culture. To be German means to be non-French. In a way, a
similar pattern may be found in Lithuanian history. In the eighteenth-
century Lithuanian-Polish Commonwealth, or the Republic of Two
Nations, a widespread identity formula of Lithuanian gentry sounded
in Latin as follows: *Sum gente Lithuanus, natione autem Polonus.* (I
am of Lithuanian descent and Polish nationality). For many reasons,
Lithuanian gentry consciously chose the Polish language as a means
of expression. Small wonder, then, that Lithuanian nationalism, when
it was on the rise in the second half of the nineteenth century, became
inseparable from a nearly desperate attempt to distinguish between
Poles and Lithuanians, whether writers and historians or statesmen,
as if to say that Lithuanians were, first and foremost, non-Poles and,
certainly, non-Russians. It was a dramatic move for a country that had
long had a common state and a shared culture with Poland.
At the end of the nineteenth century and at the beginning of the twentieth, things had gone so far as to split the families on the grounds of their allegiances. Conflicting loyalties are especially characteristic of the early phase of nationalism with its propensity to claim once-and-for-all loyalties with no room left for adversaries or rivals in historical memory and collective sentiment. Lithuania could serve as a perfect example of this tendency. For a person who stood at the crossroads of his identity as a moral and political choice, it was possible to become a signatory of the Act of Independence of Lithuania, whereas his brother was President of Poland. The signatory in question was Stanislaw Narutowicz (Stanislovas Narutavicius in Lithuanian), a Lithuanian lawyer and politician, one of the twenty signatories of the Act of Independence of Lithuania (1918), and brother to the first President of Poland, Gabriel Narutowicz.

Or recall Michal Pius Römer (Mykolas Pijus Romeris in Lithuanian), a founder of the Lithuanian Constitutional Law, professor of law and rector of Vytautas Magnus University in interwar Lithuania, who was a descendant of Polish nobility, and who chose Lithuania and pledged his allegiances to its state, although many members of his family remained more neutral to, not to say remote from, modern Lithuania. It was a time when people were still able to choose Lithuanian, Polish, or Belarusian path of identity, and they had good reason for that. Modern identity politics imposed on them the “either-or” logic, depriving them of the old good sense of belonging with no need to specify one or another ethnic or linguistic component of the country.

Dumont’s *Essays on Individualism*, by virtue of employing the perspective of the structural history of ideas, sheds new light on the encounter of the Enlightenment and Romanticism, which turns out to have been, in essence, a clash of two contrasting models of self-understanding and of the two intellectual and moral stances. According to Dumont, Johann Gottfried von Herder’s *Auch eine Philosophie der Geschichte* (*Yet Another Philosophy of History*) was a conscious response to Voltaire’s philosophy of history (Voltaire introduced the term “philosophy of history”). For Voltaire, the essence of the philosophy of history lay in reflecting on the liberation of human individuals and their consciousness from the realm of superstition. In contradistinction to Voltaire, Herder assesses the task and the subject matter of philosophy of history not in terms of the individual but as the study of historically unique peoples and their cultures.

The point is that Herder takes the *Volk* and its *Kultur* as the collective individual. Like human individuals who have, in their political existence, the inescapable rights of self-determination and self-fulfillment,
cultures are—by virtue of being collective individuals—historically unique, autonomous, self-asserting, and self-sufficient. In other words, Herder puts forward, for the first time, the idea of the autonomy of the cultural dimension. Therefore, individualism ceases to function solely as a political idea and turns into a crucial cultural category. The inner spring of the body politic, once theoretically embraced and articulated by political philosophy, transforms both into a mode of historical narrative and into an interpretive framework for the humanities.

Therefore, we have to do here with two interpretations of individualism and identity. There is no doubt that the Enlightenment provided solid ground for theoretical interpretation of political individualism and civilizational identity as political principles, but it was Romanticism that forged cultural individualism and ethnic/cultural identity as cultural constructs. To be sure, theoretical principles preceed ideological constructs: Theories—as in the cases of liberalism and nationalism—tend to transform themselves into ideologies, but the reverse sequence is in principle impossible. As Dumont insightfully points out:

Herder rehabilitates everything that the French and English eighteenth century rejected or ignored: the barbarous Middle Ages, Ancient Egypt sacrificed to the glory of Greece, and perhaps most important, religion. Instead of history consisting in the accession of reason, a reason disembodied and everywhere identical to itself, Herder sees in history the contrasted interplay of individual cultures or cultural individuals, each constituting a specific human community, or Volk, in which an aspect of general humanity is embodied in a unique and irreplaceable manner. The German Volk, bearer of western Christian culture, is the modern example of the category. In the flow of history there is not only simply progress (Fortschritt) but, within each of the two civilizational complexes, the ancient and the modern, what one may call a succession of “forward strivings” or blossomings (Fortgang, Fortstreben), all “of equal necessity, equal originality, equal merit, equal happiness.” (Dumont, 1986, 116)

So Herder seems to have been not only a critic of modern universalistic rationalism, with its one-dimensional faith in never-ending progress, but also an opponent of individualist French culture shaped by Voltaire, the Encyclopédie, and the philosophes. The Herderian definition of the human being may substantiate this statement. Contrary to the theoreticians of the Enlightenment and Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Herder speaks of the human being who consciously belongs to and prolongs the existence of his or her cultural community, rather than
of the history-free, abstract, logically derived individual—an example of the human species.

Two important implications of Dumont’s interpretation of individualism and its national variants (as we have seen, French and German) might be offered. First, Herder came to defend German culture and its natural right of being in the world in the face of the powerful and influential French culture. It was unnecessary to persuade anyone that French culture, even for German intellectuals (from Goethe and Eckermann to Fichte and Hegel), had become the quintessence and even symbol of Europe. Herder must have perceived economic and political individualism as a specifically French phenomenon, to which he opposed cultural individualism to defend the rights of non-French/nonmodern cultures and historical epochs, a number of which had been neglected or even despised by the Enlightenment thinkers. Therefore, it is by no means accidental that cultural individualism was constructed in the course of the Sturm und Drang movement, that is, in the initial phase of German Romanticism.

Second, Herder’s ideas have greatly affected not only theories but also the practice of nationalism. One wonders how a liberal-minded philosopher like Herder succeeded in making such an enormous impact on nineteenth-century racialist and explicitly racist theories, let alone Blut-und-Boden nationalism. In all likelihood, he owes his success to the ambiguity of such concepts as Volksgeist and Volksseele. One of Herder’s major contributions was his notion of equality of cultures. It was not only the most humane facet of the upcoming era of nationalism (no wonder that the concept of liberal nationalism makes sense when referred to Herder’s legacy), but an important facet of liberalism.

Last but not least, Herder’s ideas were adopted by Central/East European philosophers of history and culture. They developed Herder’s theoretical legacy into an interpretive framework within which modern modes of identity and self-comprehension were articulated. It was not without reason that Dumont described Herder as the founding father of modern East European thought. The same is true of Herder’s impact on Eastern Europe in its search for modes of identity and self-fulfillment.

**Ascription or Free Choice?**

Yet a more modern concept of tradition stresses a moral choice and a mode of self-examination in history, instead of once-and-for-all ascription or identification with what has been imposed by other
generations and forms of life. The tension between these two aspects of identity is, perhaps, best represented by the debate between the ardently conservative and nationalistic German historian Heinrich von Treitschke and his far more liberal-minded opponent, the French philosopher and writer Joseph-Ernest Renan. Whereas Treitschke made himself clear concerning the crucial point that no decent and properly educated German should ever lose his or her ethnic and linguistic substance, Renan came up with the novel and challenging idea that every nation could hardly be understood and regarded otherwise than a daily plebiscite.

Renan became especially famous for his definition of a nation given in his 1882 discourse, *Qu’est-ce qu’une nation?*. Renan defined a nation by stressing the willfulness and commitment to live together, as opposed to the German definition, formulated by Johann Gottlieb Fichte, which defined it by supposedly “objective” criteria, such as a “race” or an “ethnic group” (*das Volk*) sharing collective individuality, soul, sensitivity, memory, language, and the like. Writing in the midst of the political dispute concerning the Alsace-Lorraine region, Renan declared that the existence of a nation was based on “an everyday plebiscite” (*un plébiscite de tous les jours*). Therefore, no historical-cultural substance of the nation exists that would allow us to take it as the assurance and confirmation of that nation’s existence now and in the future.

In his discourse, Renan sounds as a true forerunner of liberal patriotism, or liberal nationalism, embracing two dimensions that constitute modern identity, namely, tradition and rationality, power and imagination, ascription and choice. He underlines duality of identity that permeates the life of a modern individual. According to Renan,

A nation is a soul, a spiritual principle. Only two things, actually, constitute this soul, this spiritual principle. One is in the past, the other is in the present. One is the possession in common of a rich legacy of remembrances; the other is the actual consent, the desire to live together, the will to continue to value the heritage which all hold in common. … A nation is a grand solidarity constituted by the sentiment of sacrifices which one has made and those that one is disposed to make again. It supposes a past, it renews itself especially in the present by a tangible deed: the approval, the desire, clearly expressed, to continue the communal life. *The existence of a nation (pardon this metaphor!) is an everyday plebiscite; it is, like the very existence of the individual, a perpetual affirmation of life* … This is less metaphysical than the concept of divine right, less brutal than the so-called historic right … Man is not enslaved, nor is his race nor his language, nor his religion, nor
In his interpretation of moral cultures, Vytautas Kavolis, an eminent Lithuanian émigré sociologist, describes tradition in the conservative-nationalistic moral culture as a moral substance for whose preservation and transmission a nationalist finds him or herself responsible. He points out,

The liberal and romantic moral cultures, after all, are rooted respectively in the individual’s rational (ascetic) and emotional (mystical) depth, whereas the nationalist moral culture rests on community, that is, a historically concrete, “natural” community, which is being, on the voluntary and mystical basis, maintained or revived by the committed individual. The individual finds him or herself as having received a significant part of his or her moral substance from his or her community, and is prepared to hand over this substance, after having it refracted through his or her own experience, to the next generation of the community members. But inasmuch as his or her community’s experience becomes his or her personal substance, part of his or her identity, he or she severely judges this community and its history rejecting those things that are perceived by him or her as the deformation of his/her moral character. At the same time, he/she judges him/herself asking whether his/her contribution to community coincides with what it needs the most. (Kavolis, 1993, 183; translation of this passage and the following ones from Lithuanian into English is mine)

History and community do not appear here as ever-presence, which you have to accept without critical questioning or examining as your forms of life. An unexamined life is not worth living; yet an unlived life is not worth examining. An unquestioned and unexamined tradition comes to a modern enlightened individual as a meaningless lock-in within an ossified power structure disconnected from the individual’s real powers of association and his or her crucial political and moral choices.

Tradition, once having been a framework for prescriptive and restrictive explanations of how to live one’s life, tends to become in our time a framework for a critical examination of modernity. Much the same applies to community, which, having long been the realm of
the repetition of the forms of life, predictability, and life cycle, now comes to a modern individual as a tool of critical self-examination.

Is our infatuation with tradition and its revival a potent alternative to modernity? Yes and no. Tradition and traditionalism appear as an antidote to the Proteus-like flux of modernity; yet it is through that same modernity that we are able to rediscover and revive our traditions. Like the search for identity, our infatuation, not to say obsession, with it is but an aspect of modernity itself. We cannot easily abandon modern forms of life as if they were decorations on stage; nor are we able to mechanically restore and reenact the past, destroying the foundations of the modern world. Echoing Dumont (Dumont, 1986), Jonathan Friedman argues with sound reason that “the only ascription that is recognized in the regime of modernity is biological” (Friedman, 1995, 218).

Like a radical nationalist who takes the past as a mask of the present or as the best-case scenario for the future, a militant traditionalist or fundamentalist speaks out in favor of the present with some corrections wanted, instead of the total annihilation of social reality. Nobody wants to give up technology or welfare; the real concern is rather about whether the secular version of modernity, or the Enlightenment project, prevails over the religion-above-the-rest version of modernity fostered by totalitarian or theocratic regimes.

Even the fiercest nationalists or the most militant fundamentalists do not believe in the triumph of tradition over modernity as the complete destruction of modern life. Instead, they seek to appropriate modernity and to create its rival version. This seems to have been the case with the former Soviet Union and Communism in general; the same seems true of Muslim fundamentalism, politicized Islam, and militant Islamism. What is the tradition in such a troubled world? A matter of once-and-for-all ascription or a matter of free choice?

The search for identity becomes the way out from this predication. We can shift our identities adjusting to the secular state and then easily turning to religion or a distinct social ritual. It is just a matter of whether we belong to a tradition or a modern ideology with all of our personality, without reserving any single aspect of ourselves to something else, or whether we lend only part of our personality to that tradition or ideology. Lewis A. Coser described the phenomenon of such a complete belonging to a political unit or ideological movement as political sectarianism (see Coser, 1970, 99–109). In more than one way, religious fundamentalism, Islamism, and the forms of politicized religion of today are reminiscent of European militant religious sects in early modernity.
Therefore, tradition, in our global world, may become a mobilizing force, a war cry, or a mask and a uniform of the troubled identity. Tradition can no longer be seen as something that makes the world a better and safer place to live. On the contrary, tradition is a troublemaker, a sinister phenomenon, and rich soil for the conflict. It is perfect food for socially and politically disturbed thought. For it is not the tradition that we need, but the sword and the shield for our assault on much-hated modernity and the modern world in general.

On the major note: The best that may happen to the tradition nowadays would be our ability to capitalize on it as a possible source of wisdom, the wisdom that would allow us to transcend the disciplines, methods, left- and right-wing sensitivities alike, and partisan politics. The wisdom that would enable and inspire us to throw new light on old ground.
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Chapter 2

To Be or to Forget

Politics of Remembering versus Politics of Forgetting

You owe me three farthings, say the bells of St Martin’s,
When will you pay me? say the bells of Old Bailey—

—George Orwell, 1984

Theory is never so fine as when it takes the form of a fiction
or a fable.


The Will-to-Remember versus the Will-to-Forget

The conservative imagination is tragic and pessimistic, while the liberal imagination reveals itself and the world around us in a more playful, optimistic, and ironic fashion. Tragedy remains the essence of the conservative imagination, whereas the liberal imagination is best represented by laughter.

In The Book of Laughter and Forgetting, Milan Kundera describes Gustav Husak as the President of Forgetting who needs the forms of aesthetic and political kitsch and mass culture as potent instruments of organized forgetting. After 1968, Husak refuses to take seriously a mass emigration of Czech and Slovakian writers, composers, film directors, scholars, and medical doctors; yet he immediately reacts to the emigration of a pop music star, Klaus. Husak writes a friendly and warm letter to a pop music singer, asking him to return to
Czechoslovakia and promising him heaven on earth. Never mind that an exodus of the intelligentsia deprived the country of its intellectual and artistic potential. Yet the emigration of a music idiot is a tragedy, for Husak understands that they work hand in hand, jointly and efficiently robbing Czechoslovakia of its memory and history. They need each other. The President of Forgetting and the Music Idiot work for the same cause.

The Czech Communist Party leader Klement Gottwald and his comrade Vladimír Clementis stand in the winter of the year 1948 ready for a solemn speech in a historic building without knowing that this was the German gymnasium where Franz Kafka studied. They would never suspect that Kafka’s father had a store on the ground floor of the building where a jackdaw was depicted on the wall. “Kavka” is the Czech word for jackdaw. In four years, Clementis who kindly offers his hat to Gottwald to protect a comrade from freezing will be hanged for the alleged coup, and his image will be eliminated from all photographs. All that remains of Clementis is the cap on Gottwald’s head. The same applies to Clementis’s place in political memory manufactured by the regime: He is merely a miserable traitor whose face is unworthy to remember and whose name has to sink into oblivion.

Kundera ascribes the fatal forgetting to the city of Prague. Prague appears in Franz Kafka’s *The Trial* (1925) as a city devoid of memory and self-comprehension. Prague is entangled in the same frame of mind. It constantly changes the names of its streets, forging the city’s life as a never-ending present and obliterating every trace of the past. In doing so, the city turns into a memory-free ghost, a creature of anonymous mass society, and nonentity. The Counter-Reformation did this by changing the names of Prague’s streets and creating an illusion that the real history will start anon. In the twentieth century, Prague was forced to believe that up to then its history was a fraud, and that History, with a capital *H*, comes up now with new names and narratives.

However, to lightly equate remembering with authentic existence and forgetting with the obliteration of self or the denial of the world, is the last thing a serious writer would do. Too much memory can destroy human life, as Kundera convincingly shows by depicting the novel’s heroine Tamina, a young and beautiful widow, who is unable to build a second life in France. Tamina is unable to establish any lasting emotional and social intimacy with a small French town’s milieu. She does not belong there. Mentally, Tamina continues living elsewhere. Nor is she capable of restoring her powers of association and ability to forget, two indispensable conditions of the will-to-life.
Tamina is separated from her intimacy and memory since all of her letters are left in Prague. Little chance exists that her love letters and diaries remained unread by her relatives or, worse, unscrutinized by the regime. In a desperate attempt to keep in touch with her family members and to recover her letters, Tamina engages in an empty and meaningless affair with a young Frenchman to be able to make expensive long-distance telephone calls to Prague from his apartment. The divorce of the present and the past does not offer any way out of this predicament. Tamina is doomed to failure. Too much memory becomes the unbearable burden, depriving her of the meaning of existence and forcing her to take her life.

In Kundera’s novel *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, the heroine Teresa becomes vulnerable and fragile because of her failure to forget the traumatizing experience with her mother. It is hardly accidental that, in addition to Kafka and Kundera, one more major Central European writer, Robert Musil, depicts the man without qualities in his novel of the same title, *The Man without Qualities* (1930–1942).

The anonymity, facelessness, angst, anguish, solitude, isolation, and despair of the cornered individual come out in Musil’s novel as the unavoidable signs and manifestations of the destructive powers of modernity with all of its obsessive fixations on the liberation of individuals from their legacy, past, and inherited parts of identity.

The destructive powers of modernity would be unthinkable without forgetting the past, a crucial aspect of modernity’s obsessive belief in the future. That dying individuals lose their past rather than the present and the future we learn from the unbearably light and ironic Kundera but not from the deadly serious prophets of modernity. Yet the politics of remembering is not the way out of the uncertainties and painful dilemmas of modernity. It works well as a remedy from the malaise of forgetting, oblivion, and insensitivity, as long as it serves as a framework for dissenting thought and stance. The politics of remembering starts functioning as a prescriptive mode of self-comprehension. It can turn into a dangerous fixation on the selected series of events and historical personalities, resulting in the total denial of those individuals and groups that remember in a different fashion.

The politics of remembering is sound and good only insofar as we maintain the legitimacy of two or more opposed modes of memory and narratives. The legitimacy of two opposed interpretations of the same phenomenon, including political experience, is what modernity with a human face is all about. A happy and unforced equilibrium of remembering and forgetting appears as the natural condition of our life. The politics of remembering, if forced and practiced with no alternative to
it, unavoidably will be at the peril of becoming an oppressive instru-
ment of arbitrary and selective memory. Such a memory can serve as
the denial of others and their right to experience and remember the
world in the way they want. Competing memories and opposed nar-
ratives are characteristic of warring nationalisms, especially when they
clash in multiethnic, multireligious, and multicultural cities.

In fact, the politics of remembering reveals the past as a critical
aspect of our experience, as something without which we could never
sustain our political and moral sensibilities. Yet when it becomes the
axis of political life, we can slide into the tyranny of the frozen time,
dividing the world into “us” and “them.” In doing so, we risk adopt-
ing the Manichaean moral logic that does not allow us to grasp social
reality as consisting of flesh-and-blood human beings able to change
their views, convictions, and stances. The tyranny of the past would
never allow us to reconcile ourselves with the world, especially when
peace with the former political foe and oppressor is at issue.

Nothing is simple and obvious here, for the dialectic of forget-
ting and forgiving is one of the most complex human experiences. To
regard all Germans as crypto-Nazi or at least as covert sympathizers
of National Socialism and anti-Semites would be barbarous, as would
believing that all Russians are natural-born totalitarians and imperial-
ists. We have to suspend the details of our martyrdom and to over-
come the temptations of comparative martyrrology not to contaminate
present forms of life with hatred.

This effort implies a methodical forgetting, which is reminiscent
of suspending or putting aside what does not help to deal with pres-
ent social and political reality. Such an effort does not signify the
repression of our memory or the arrival of a mental self-censorship.
Contrary to a widespread opinion, the politics of forgetting does not
necessarily imply the destructiveness of modern life with totalitarian
regimes, devaluation of life, insensitivity, and social constructivism.
Sometimes, forgetting lends itself to forgiveness, liberating us from
the burden of worn-out concepts and arguments. Like remember-
ing, forgetting is at its best when it comes as an existential and moral
choice. Forgetting cannot be an imposed action, which surfaces, leav-
ing unresolved tensions, animosities, and hatred underneath. This is
to say that remembering and forgetting have to encompass each other
as two complementary forms of grasping life and as two intertwined
ways of looking at the world around us.

According to Kundera, if human beings were able to remember
everything, they would become totally self-contained, self-sufficient,
and, in effect, dramatically diminished in their powers of association.
Modernity has an obsession to control memory and to rewrite history in accordance with power distribution or disposition. I am in control of societal existence and culture; therefore, I am able to provide a legitimizing narrative. Memory is an aspect of power. What and how to remember and what and how to forget depends on who writes an account of an epoch’s history and political deeds.

To memorize and keep everything for the generations to come, prolonging the existence of, and giving a second life to, those who deserve it? I remember, therefore, I am? Or to forget what is irrational and does not qualify for the realm of collective memory? These are two opposed, if not mutually exclusive, promises of modernity.

We know that all three of the greatest authors of twentieth-century dystopias, Yevgeny Zamyatin, Aldous Huxley, and George Orwell, prophesied the arrival of a social and political catastrophe resulting from the logic of modernity pushed to the limit. This is to say that they depicted the radical version of modernity running up against its ultimate barrier. Using literary techniques and devices, Zamyatin’s *We*, Huxley’s *Brave New World*, and Orwell’s *1984* seek what such twentieth-century thinkers as Hannah Arendt, Simone Weil, Lewis Mumford, Isaiah Berlin, and Leszek Kolakowski sought in their social and political philosophy. In its much earlier anticipation of totalitarianism, literature overtakes theory. Literature offers a deeper presentiment of modernity’s dangers.

Zamyatin, whose novel *We* (1924) markedly influenced Huxley’s *Brave New World* (1932) and Orwell’s *1984* (1949), portrayed transparent glass houses in which the inhabitants of the Only State were required to live and be constantly seen. This novel, a half century before Michel Foucault’s “panopticon” theory appeared in *Discipline and Punish*, revealed modernity to be the incarnation of the obsession with unlimited power and unrestricted control. Zamyatin describes this obsession as the observation without a response and as a perfectly developed discourse of power. The asymmetry of power lies in the elusive authorities’ ability to deprive us of our privacy and to make us act as if we were under surveillance all the time. To cut a convoluted and long story short, Zamyatin preceded and anticipated what the French poststructuralist, historian of consciousness, and political theorist Michel Foucault was to achieve through his complex and multidimensional theory.

Doubt may arise about chastising authors, especially Zamyatin and Orwell, as having been allied with the conservative imagination. These writers were openly leftist in their political views and attacked modernity more as a basic foundational structure of economic, social,
and political existence. The essential institutional manifestation and, at the same time, the sociological hypostasis of modernity is capitalism. Yet the criticism of modernity of these authors, when we set aside their political views and biographies and then analyze the texts themselves, is notably conservative and proffers forms of the recognition and interpretation of reality that would be held by just about any conservative writer or thinker.

All three of those authors of great dystopias portray the death of the institution of family. Orwell reveals its degradation, while Zamyatin and Huxley its utter disappearance. But they object to the annihilation of love. The love story of Winston Smith and Julia in *1984* is a final desperate human and social attempt to stave off the depersonalizing and dehumanizing machine of totalitarian control. This effort fails, just as the love between the narrator D-503 and the dissident I-330 in Zamyatin’s *We* fails. The narrator’s love, sociability, and powers of association are cut from under him by the regime.

*We* and *Brave New World* reveal a reality in which love and the family cease to exist. Only sex, unrestrained by the state, remains. In Orwell’s novel, even sex starts to degrade because the Party is powerless to destroy the orgasm, over which it has no control. As we learn from Winston and Julia’s dialogues, sex in Oceania is reduced to mere multiplication, although this does not apply to the Inner Party with whose members Julia has had secret affairs. The three dystopias describe the elimination of privacy, which means a veritable triumph of the state organs of control. This obvious threat posed by present-day modernity, which was to be flagged in studies by Jürgen Habermas and Zygmunt Bauman, was foreseen by writers of dystopias.

Modernity seeks to control our memory and language in their entirety. Winston Smith attempts to recall a cherished boyhood song, which is taken over and finished by the character O’Brien, an alleged friend and brother-in-arms of Winston in the holy cause of resistance to the regime, who turns out to be a high-ranking official in the Inner Party. Oceania, in which Orwell’s book creates a new language, the Newspeak, is supposed to become a place where human perception and understanding of space and time would be transformed.

With this language, nobody would be able to understand Shakespeare. This means that the reality represented in the classical literary imagination would become unrecognizable. Radically changing everyone’s field of reference and system of concepts will make it easy to take away from them the dimension of the past. And by taking over their field of reference and system of concepts, humanity’s history can
be firmly taken over in the manner required by the collective solipsism professed by Big Brother and the Party.

*We* speaks to the death of the classical and the death of the past. In the Only State’s education system, classical studies no longer exist, and the humanities in general disappear. Regarding the death of humanism and the prohibition of the study of history and classics in the education of the world of the future, the French writer Sébastien Mercier, in 1770, had first written about and given form to the extremes of the ideology of never-ending progress in his work of political fantasy, *The Year 2440* (see Bury, 1987, 192–201).

In Zamyatin’s dystopia, the past is associated with barbarians whose primitive works, threatening rationality and progress, cannot be studied, while the worst illness in the Only State is what the ancient Greeks referred to as the soul. Therefore, in the context of the dystopias of Zamyatin, Huxley, and Orwell, the compound phrase “technocratic totalitarianism” would be a pleonasm, since no other form of totalitarianism seemed possible to them.

The disappearance of other important spheres discussed by these dystopias is private space, private property, which is torn out by its root, and our favorite belongings. Winston reminisces constantly about his favorite possessions, which are a part of his world and his human identity. Michael Walzer draws attention that it is for Winston’s lower middle-class sentimentality and attachment to things, and not for his ideas, that Orwell was criticized mercilessly by Raymond Williams and other intellectuals of England’s Left. Such intellectuals were unable to forgive Orwell for bestowing Churchill’s first name on his novel’s protagonist (see Walzer, 1988).

We can reject any residual doubts about Orwell’s conservative sentiments, which were never incorporated into the realm of his political views and evaluations. Unlike the majority of English socialists, Orwell held patriotism to be a value and would have agreed with Simone Weil’s reality of rootedness, as developed in her work *The Need for Roots* (1949). Like Weil, Orwell was convinced that our rootedness in this-worldly reality of community life, locality, and attachment to the past is a crucial fact of life and an existential need. That we lose the past rather than the future when we die was sensed by Orwell long before Kundera made this insight the thread of *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting* (1979). Curiously, Kundera strongly disliked Orwell’s *1984*, describing it as a bad novel that, according to Kundera, misrepresented human existence, dangerously reducing it to politics (see Kundera, 1995, 225).
What kind of imagination constructs utopias and dystopias? To come up with an overarching answer is difficult. This is a form of imagination in which plots dictated liberal, conservative, and socialist thought and sensibility. Yet utopias and dystopias would never have been born without the conservative trajectory of this form of imagination and without the conservative sensibility that lurks in the modern moral imagination.

Zamyatin’s *We*, Orwell’s *1984*, and Huxley’s *Brave New World* depict a memory-free world deprived of public historical archives and the humanities in general, as Mercier’s *The Year 2440* presents the world of the future where no room exists for history. The study and teaching of history is abandoned in twenty-fifth-century France since to study a series of human follies and irrational actions is a disgrace. How can a rational human being study the past deeply permeated by superstition and backwardness?

Kundera takes Central Europe as a region where a small territory is combined with cultural diversity. Central Europe is so in contrast to Russia, which represents the opposite model based on the immense territory and uniformity. Central Europe relates to Eastern Europe as history relates to geography. At this point, Kundera goes so far as to exclude Russia from Europe, a move that was not endorsed by Joseph Brodsky, Czeslaw Milosz, and Timothy Garton Ash, among others (see Kundera, 1984, 33–38; Ash, 1999, 166).

In the philosophical implications of Kundera’s literature, history appears as a meaningful and silent moral alternative to the brutality of geopolitics and power politics carried out by the powerful. The memory becomes a tool of the small and weak, while forgetting best serves the interests of the big and mighty. In doing so, memory manifests as an alternative moral imagination opposed to the logic of power. Memory of the powerful is nothing more than a celebration of successful practice, in the sense of Niccolò Machiavelli’s concept of verità effettuale (efficacious truth; see Berlin, 2001, 25–79). Memory is a practice, instead of an elusive human ability or potential.

Yet this thread of Kundera’s thought does not exhaust his understanding of how memory works in the modern world. What Kundera implies is that memory uncovers its essence as a conscious effort to continue or to prolong the existence of what deserves to exist. Therefore, the cultural canon is a mode of the existence of organized memory. Within the framework of organized memory, Shakespeare, Van Dyck, Hals, Vermeer, or Rembrandt, depicting, portraying, or else individualizing their contemporaries, become part of the process of a conscious continuation of someone else’s existence.
Central European intellectuals have long had many reservations about partisan politics, exemplified by their distaste for the Manichaeism of the Left and the Right, which, in Kundera’s words, “is as stupid as it is insurmountable” yet so deeply grounded in Western Europe (Kundera, 1984, 36). Some commentators insist on the irrelevance of this divide in the political spectrum of democratic societies. Yet we would deceive ourselves by arguing that those ideological, political, and moral abysses are no longer the case in the contemporary world, as far as the gaps between the economic or political power agencies and alienated or doctrinaire intellectuals are concerned.

Culture, instead of politics, remains a unifying principle of the civilizational identity of Central Europe. As Kundera wrote in 1984,

But if to live means to exist in the eyes of those we love, then Central Europe no longer exists. More precisely: in the eyes of its beloved Europe, Central Europe is just a part of the Soviet empire and nothing more, nothing more. And why should this surprise us? By virtue of its political system, Central Europe is the East; by virtue of its cultural history, it is the West. But since Europe itself is in the process of losing its own cultural identity, it perceives in Central Europe nothing but a political regime; put another way, it sees in Central Europe only Eastern Europe. Central Europe, therefore, should fight not only against its big oppressive neighbor but also against the subtle, relentless pressure of time, which is leaving the era of culture in its wake. That’s why in Central European revolts there is something conservative, nearly anachronistic: they are desperately trying to restore the past, the past of culture, the past of the modern era. It is only in that period, only in a world that maintains a cultural dimension, that Central Europe can still defend its identity, still be seen for what it is. (ibid., 36–37)

In an epoch in which culture bows out and loses its significance, politics becomes incapable of pursuing universalistic ideals and values: This is the message of Kundera. Little wonder, then, that West European and North American intellectuals can hardly hope for a fruitful dialogue with their Central European counterparts when the peace movement or the idea of socialism is at issue. What looks to West Europeans and North Americans like an alternative and humane project of modernity, to Central Europeans, it is merely a historic wound, a thoroughly examined and failed possibility, and a false promise of modernity with a human face. This gap of historical and social experience, which turned out to be so wide between the “mainstream” of the West and “another Europe,” sheds much light on why Central
European intellectuals embraced the Popperian idea of the open society with such fervor.

You might suggest that dystopian literature depicted the nightmares of the twentieth century and anticipated those simulations of reality or fabrications of consciousness that were, and continue to be, deeply characteristic of the modern mass-media world. That our perception of the world and our awareness may be framed by the mass media, that we deal with images, forgeries, and phantoms instead of reality as it is, was shown plausibly by Jean Baudrillard. His acclaimed theory of simulacra, or simulations of reality, is quite similar to what Kundera has aptly described as the world manufactured by the new type of mass-media people whom he calls “imagologues,” the engineers and dispensers of images (see Baudrillard, 1983; Kundera, 1991).

Imagology, the art of making sets of ideals, anti-ideals, and value-images that people are supposed to follow without thinking or critically questioning, is the offspring of the media and advertising. If so, as Kundera argues in his novel Immortality (1990), reality disappears. In his novel Mao II (1992), Don DeLillo depicts much the same phenomenon: The world is replaced by a set of constantly renewable and adjustable images that captivate human minds and souls. Violence, disasters, and wars firmly occupy the former place of literature, becoming the only viable narrative in our days (see DeLillo, 1992).

At this point, totalitarianism appears to have been modernity pushed to the limit, with all the resulting consequences of the rational planning and conscious transformation of the world. Totalitarianism, with its obsession in remaking the world through its limitless manipulation, is nothing other than modernity gone mad. Yet an unbridgeable gulf exists between the manufacturing of situations, reactions, and passions, which occurs through mass media or information technology and the global social engineering that totalitarian regimes undertake. Whatever the case, as long as those things threaten human dignity and the sense of European legacy, whether the cultural canon or our shared burden of modernity, Kundera would speak up against them. As a writer and essayist, Kundera does what Zygmunt Bauman has been doing as a social theorist and critic, bridging East, Central, and Western European forms of existence, sensitivity, and identity.

**Faster Than History, yet Slower Than a Lifetime**

Our contemporaries are obviously tempted to proclaim the twentieth century as the era of the end of nearly everything that relates
to the historical, moral, and political imaginations: Postmodernism, postmaterialism, postideological politics, post-Christian era, postindustrial society, postcapitalist economy, and so forth. No aspect of politics and culture remains untouched by this postmodern propensity, not to say obsession, to relegate the phenomena of modernity to the margins of history. Nowadays it is difficult to imagine any sort of modern social phenomenon pronounced or written without this sonorous “post” that indicates the death or at least the symbolic end of the modern moral imagination and modernity itself. Yet this is not the end of the story. Now we are to put into question the validity and existence of history itself.

Of the temptation of many writers and commentators to write off our stage in the history of modernity as passing away or dying away or bowing out in terms of the end of history, Zygmunt Bauman writes, “What prompts so many commentators to speak of the ‘end of history,’ of post-modernity, ‘second modernity’ and ‘surmodernity,’ or otherwise to articulate the intuition of a radical change in the arrangement of human cohabitation and in social conditions under which life-politics is nowadays conducted, is the fact that the long effort to accelerate the speed of modernity has presently reached its ‘natural limit’” (Bauman, 2008, 10–11).

Societies that experienced the terror of ideology are naturally tempted to deny or at least to call into question the History, with a capital $H$, as just another term for Ideology. Central/East European artists and intellectuals know better than anybody what it means to live under the terror of the Inexorable Laws of History. Too much history can become a burden. Territorial claims, bloodshed, and education of hatred are nearly always justified by referring to history and religion: The subordination of the two to politics is a disease of our time. The same applies to the clashes over the exclusive right to possess the holy sites or to have the final say in the rivalries of politically exploited religions over this-worldly matters or in the encounters of violent ideologies.

Competing memories, loyalties, pains, and sufferings have no better justification and reference point than history. Too much history may be at odds with our modern intellectual and moral sensibilities, although it is obvious that our infatuation with history is itself a sign of modernity. We respect and cherish a strong sense of history in ourselves and in others; yet when it comes to a kind of conservative disdain for present politics and culture, we tend to strongly object to the domination of “eternal yesterday” (to use Max Weber’s term) over today or tomorrow. Whereas the liberal imagination speaks out
in favor of today and tomorrow, the conservative imagination raises its voices in defense of yesterday. Hence the dividing line between the liberal and the conservative approach to history.

However, suffice it to recall the dystopian world of Zamyatin, Orwell, Huxley, and Arthur Koestler, where history is but an empty sound. History does not signify anything there anymore because it is thrown at the mercy of the will-to-power and the metaphysics of the will, which identifies reality with its conscious transformation or “rationalization.” According to this design of thought, history has to be measured in hours and minutes, instead of decades and centuries. Moreover, history has to be made and unmade every day. If so, we have to treat human lives as clay or bronze or oil on our brush: We have to clean the canvas or dismantle the construction instantly as the need for an adjustment or new configuration arises. How can we abolish art only on the basis of someone’s claim that we consume too much oil or bronze?

As O’Brien from Orwell’s 1984 points out, empirical reality does not exist other than through the Party, its politics, and its interpretation of that reality. If so, the human being is merely a construct of the Party’s metaphysics of the will. A particular human individual has no independent existence. The Party supplies the only means through which he or she can identify and express him or herself as an individual—self-identification, perception of reality, memory, and language. In fabricating these, the Party forges consciousness and human existence. History does not exist either. It is merely constructed by the politically predominant modes of discourse.

Yet it is quite possible to belong mentally and intellectually to mutually exclusive symbolic designs of memory, loyalty, participation, and self-comprehension. Some people claim to act in a postmodern world and, accordingly, to think within the framework of postmodernism, whereas others speak out in favor of modernity. As Bauman reminds us, the history of time began with modernity; moreover, modernity is the history of time—or to put it in another fashion, modernity is the time when time has a history (see Bauman, 2008, 110).

There is another problem here, though. Postmodernism with its well-known inclinations toward historical and ethical relativism is capable of putting into question what undoubtedly constitutes the moral substance of many people. We can call into question the existence and validity of nearly every social and political phenomenon, but if we doubt the historical validity of the Holocaust, then we are at risk of losing the ground. If we deny the Holocaust, then we deny history, and the other way around. What is behind such a stance is value,
rather than sheer fact. History exists insofar as value precedes truth. A narrator of history is therefore a moralist, rather than a sheer dispenser of a scholarly technique, scientific method, or truth.

The news of the end of modernity, of modernity’s decline and passing away along with history itself, appears to have been premature. As Bauman points out,

And yet … the news of modernity’s passing away, even the rumours of its swan song, are grossly exaggerated: their profusion does not make the obituaries any less premature. It seems that the kind of society which has been diagnosed and put on trial by the founders of critical theory (or, for that matter, by Orwell’s dystopia) was just one of the forms that versatile and protean modern society was to take. Its waning does not augur the end of modernity. Nor does it herald the end of human misery. Least of all does it presage the end of critique as an intellectual task and vocation; and by no means does it render such critique redundant. (ibid., 27–28)

Interestingly, the “faster than history” idiom acquires a special meaning when dealing with social change of Central and Eastern Europe. The speed of time in what Kundera has once described as “yet another Europe” is beyond the historical, cultural, and political imagination of Western Europeans and North Americans. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, post-Soviet and post-Communist countries underwent considerable social and cultural change.

What became, in Western Europe, the greatest events and civilization-shaping movements was bound to appear, in Central and Eastern Europe, as mandatory and rapid economic and political programs. This is to say that the new democracies had to catch up with Western European history to qualify for the exclusive and honorary club of Europe. European cultural identity and infatuation with Western Europe’s history and culture did not suffice to enter the space of Europe. Identity as economic and political achievement, rather than identity as a forward-looking project or an interpretive framework for self-comprehension and memory, became the passport of Eastern Europe back to the West. Moreover, “yet another Europe” had to become even faster than history, transforming itself into a recognizable collective actor of global economy and politics.

In a way, Kundera was right: Economy and politics, rather than cultural identity, paved the way back to the world with which Eastern and Central Europe has always identified so strongly and passionately.
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That capitalism inexorably generates anger became clear to social scientists a long time ago. In fact, the effort to explain social anger lies at the very foundation of social science. What else … are the concepts of “alienation, anomie, ressentiment, Vermassung, class struggle” but attempts to make sense of the “passionate anger, fear, and resentment” that capitalism and modernity were so obviously creating?

—David Ost, The Defeat of Solidarity

Economic Ideology and Bernard Mandeville’s Paradox

As Louis Dumont shows in his illuminating book From Mandeville to Marx: The Genesis and Triumph of Economic Ideology, individualism was instrumental in the emergence of economics, the latter becoming the acme and the heart of individualism. The implication of Dumont’s thought would be that the more economic thought dominates our value-and-idea system and the more it emancipates from political thought, the more radical version of modernity we have.

The British variant of liberalism has been traditionally linked to economic theory. German liberalism has its links with social philosophy (Immanuel Kant, Johann Gottfried von Herder) and French liberalism with the study of religion (Benjamin Constant, Alexis de
Tocqueville, Numa Denis Fustel de Coulanges, Joseph-Ernest Renan, and Émile Durkheim, among others). Therefore, the continental variants of liberalism, in terms of disciplinary preferences and theoretical inclinations, have always been, and continue to be, less individualistic and economics oriented, and, consequently, more philosophical (Germany) or sociological (France) than the initial, that is, British, variant of liberalism.

What are the theoretical and ideological signs of modernity that we can identify in early modernity and in what Ulrich Beck takes as the second modernity, and Bauman as liquid modernity? First, it is the emancipation of economic thought from political thought and a gradual departure from universalist ethics. The way out from this moral cul-de-sac is found in a sui generis ethics, that is, business ethics. As Dumont says, “Economics as a ‘philosophical category’ represents the acme of individualism and as such tends to be paramount in our universe” (Dumont, 1977, 54).

Incidentally, nowhere else but in the West was wealth, or economic and financial power, separated from political power. In traditional societies and classical civilizations, power was an inseparable whole that included its indispensable economic and political aspects. Nothing is certain and obvious here, like with all other modern phenomena. We could argue that this divorce of economic and political power released an enormous amount of creative energy in the Renaissance and provided at least a temporary retreat to some long-suffering and persecuted groups in Europe, such as Huguenots and Jews, whose only hope of survival and safety lay in their trading and financial skills. Yet this divorce would gradually lead politics to the miserable role of a maiden to economy, a disastrous move that devastated present politics, not to mention the instrumental and pragmatic approach to public international affairs that left no room for universalist ethics.

That the concept of property—embracing life, liberty, and estate—and economic reasoning in general become central in modern/liberal political thought, is obvious from John Locke. As Locke points out, men enter into society for the “mutual Preservation of their Lives, Liberties and Estates, which I call by the general Name, Property” (cited in Dumont, 1977, 52). With good reason, then, Dumont assumes that “in Locke, politics as such, is reduced to an adjunct of morality and economics. Morality and economics provide, in the ‘law of nature,’ the basis on which political society should be constructed” (ibid., 54).

In early modern political philosophy, morality and moral obligation were key concepts and concerns. According to Dumont, “it is moral obligation that prevents liberty from degenerating into mere license”
Yet the divorce of economics and politics did not promise anything good to morality either. Historically and politically thinking, neither side has benefited from this split. In the long run, politics was to become a maiden of economy, and morality/ethics increasingly applied, differentiated, specialized, or otherwise de-universalized.

A curious philosophical book, disguised as an innocent fable and published at the beginning of the eighteenth century, may throw new light on all these entanglements and the mixed logic of modernity. The book is Bernard Mandeville’s *Fable of Bees: Private Vices, Publick Benefits* (two successive editions in 1714 and 1723). Originated in 1705 as a sixpenny satire in verse, titled *The Grumbling Hive; or, Knaves Turn’d Honest*, later it developed into a book by the addition of “Remarks” and other pieces.

A witty and subtle attack against three vices, Fraud, Luxury, and Pride, the poem offered a strong argument, presenting a hive as a mirror of human society. Like society, the hive lives in corruption and prosperity. Yet it feels nostalgia for virtue and keeps praying to recover it. When the prayer is granted, everything changes overnight beyond recognition: There is no more vice, but activity and prosperity disappear. What replaces activity and prosperity are sloth, poverty, and boredom. Last but not least, all this happens in a considerably reduced population.

The essence of what I would define as Mandeville’s paradox is that individual vice in universalistic morality can turn into a public benefit, whereas individual virtue does not necessarily increase the well-being of society. Once society can benefit from our pursuit of our own interest, we cannot lightly dismiss private vices. Mandeville achieves something similar to Machiavelli’s effect: No one single truth exists in social reality, and every coin has two sides as far as human interaction and social life is concerned. Nothing personal lurks behind the predominant social and moral order, and nobody can be blamed in person for the shortcomings and imperfections of our life. Our jealousy and greed just happen to coincide with other individual’s wishes and desires.

Public benefits result from private vices just as common good comes from our realism, sober-mindedness, and imperfection. Like Machiavelli, Mandeville deprives us of One Single Truth in social and political life. Nothing is certain and obvious here. A greedy but laborious fool can be more useful for society than an idle sage—here we can clearly hear the early voice of modernity with its ambivalence, skepticism, and relativism.
What can be found behind the fictional paraphernalia of Mandeville’s *Fable of Bees* is Pierre Bayle’s *Dictionnaire historique et critique* (see ibid., 72). Mandeville’s skepticism, antirationalism, relativism, along with a strong emphasis on psychology and sensualism, relates him to French theoretical and intellectual influences, Bayle and Pierre Gassendi. Incidentally, Adam Smith knew this fable through Francis Hutcheson. The following winged expression of Smith’s has really much in common with the intrinsic logic of Mandeville’s paradox: “It is not from the benevolence of the butcher, the brewer, or the baker that we expect our dinner, but from their regard to their own interest” (cited in ibid., 63).

Here we can hear the birth-cry of “rational impersonalism,” as Ken Jowitt would have it. Impersonalism, ambiguity, and ambivalence coupled with what Max Weber once described as “the iron cage” are those intrinsic forces that make modernity and capitalism in particular so deplorable and hateful in the eyes of those who want to restore what has been irreversibly lost by our modern world—namely, the predictability, clarity, visibility, stability, and certainty of social reality; safety and security; political passions and social upheavals; emotional intimacy; human fellowship; a sense of community.

A never-ending series of scientific, technological, political, and even religious rationalizations and transformations of the world eventually deprived us of polarities and dichotomies, that is, properties so precious to everyone who prizes clarity, simplicity, and black-and-white optics of social reality, instead of doubt and lack of certainty. Hatred of modernity miraculously restores this sort of perception of reality. In addition, it promises a strong, resilient, and negative identity—an identity against, instead of an identity for.

In *Escape from Freedom*, Erich Fromm’s brilliant analysis of the unbearable contradictions of modernity in societal and in the human individual’s life, he shed new light on how the phenomenon that he terms the “social character,” as a totality of reactions and adaptive strategies to social reality, internalizes over time the tensions, pressures, dichotomies, uncertainties, promises, expectations, or side effects of human emancipation that mark and permeate modernity (see Fromm, 1994, 275–96). Fromm implies that authoritarian personality, along with the cult of power resulting from the surrender to powerful social and political forces beyond any control, is but a response to the logic of modern life or globalization that leaves us with no plausible theory or ideology. We fear and hate what we fail to understand or what turns out to be beyond our reach and control.
With sound reason, Fromm analyzes capitalism as the practical and institutional embodiment of modernity and as a modern civilization-shaping force, which, according to him, made as profound and lasting influence on the formation of the social character of the modern lower- and upper-middle-class individual as two major civilization-shaping Reformation movements, Lutheranism and Calvinism (see ibid., 39–102). The modern attempts to eliminate or at least to silence doubt, “whether they consist in a compulsive striving for success, in the belief that unlimited knowledge of facts can answer the quest for certainty, or in the submission to a leader who assumes the responsibility for ‘certainty’—all these solutions can only eliminate the awareness of doubt” (ibid., 78–79). Has not always the change from doubt to certainty been a rational process, though. On the contrary, it can be profoundly irrational. The outcome of the emergence of capitalism was that the individual lost the security of certainty, which was restored to some extent by the Reformation.

Dumont’s argument works well; it tries to understand the logic of globalization or, as Bauman would have it, the human consequences of liquid modernity. Like the present state whose functions, according to Bauman, are increasingly confined by global capitalism to the largest security agency at the service to transnational corporations, politics is a stepdaughter of economics from the eighteenth century onward. Since economics, as Dumont argues, is the realm of methodological individualism or nominalism par excellence, whereas sociology, if properly understood, originates as a hundred percent holistic project, we can regard Karl Marx to have been a sociological economist, rather than an economic sociologist. According to Dumont, it comes together with Marx that Individual becomes Society (see ibid., 136–37). Small wonder that Karl Pribram stressed the pseudouniversalism, or, in Dumont’s parlance, pseudoholism, of Marx (see Dumont, 1986, 156). Marxian classes have all characteristics of individuals. They pursue their interest, passionately defend their values, and fight one another.

The same sort of social and political logic permeates multiple and communicating identities. They contain human lives, individual biographies, clashes, encounters, records, and accounts; at the same time, identities serve as a battleground for the encounters, both imagined and real, of collectivities, groups, and classes. Something profoundly pseudoholistic and pseudouniversalistic exists in identities as well. This logic applies to identity parades and contests as well. Like flesh-and-blood human beings, identities engage in rivalries, alliances, and animosities. In a way, “identity” is what has been left of “race” and
troubled identity and the modern world

“class”—namely, the remains of a dividing and mobilizing principle that gradually replaces the rationally acting and thinking individuals as a concept and as reference term and suggests a never-ending war.

The Enlightenment project is turned down and abolished each time when we speak up in favor of race, color, or class, instead of pursuing human rights and solidarity as a universal principle. Much the same applies to identity, which is exactly what surfaces when an empire, a great power, or a blueprint for a valid moral and social order collapses. Identities are the ruins of the Enlightenment. In a way, they are the ruins of our belief in universal humanity. Each time we hear somewhere that people are prepared to sacrifice their lives for the sake of their ethnic or religious identity, we can be certain that the sense of universal fellowship was irreversibly lost there. Identities proliferate in an explosive manner immediately when a bellicose state or a powerful imperial entity collapses leaving its multiethnic, multireligious, and multicultural society in no man’s land.

Then a cosmopolitan and idyllic city, home of more than several cultures, may become a casus belli. This is what happened to the Balkans. In one way or another, this happened to all postcolonial countries, from the Middle East and North Africa to Eastern Europe. I do not wish to be misunderstood. As long as identity operates as a symbolic design for self-perception and self-comprehension, it is as legitimate and logical as our wish to secure our privacy, independence, and autonomy. Like race and class, identity is at its best when it operates in the liberal-democratic political setting as a fact of societal life. Just like race and class, identity becomes quite dangerous when it turns into obsession.

The Individual becomes Identity. Modernity not only generates anger, fear, uncertainty, unsafety, insecurity, and hatred; it fosters identity as a project-ahead-of-us and as a promise that we will be able to find the meaning of our existence in ourselves. A false promise, as modern life and its predicaments testify. Social and class divisions, the split of the modern political and moral sensibilities, divorce of the faculties of the soul, or dissonances of opposing aspects of freedom—these are all inseparable from the troubled identity.

Conservatism and Troubled Identity

Conservatism is one of the three principal modern political ideologies. Together with liberalism and socialism, it has become an ideological pillar of the worldview of modernity. So what makes conservatism essentially different from liberalism and socialism? Conservatism
is a union of belief and power in the truest sense, together with a belief in a canon and specific cultural traditions. No other ideology or philosophy defends belief, tradition, history, and the value of the canon to modern consciousness and existence. Where socialists, and the Left in general, favor rational planning, coordination, innovation, and reform, classical conservatives have faithfully leaned on tradition, and they emphasize the primacy of the social and moral order underpinning it.

Conservatism has always been linked inexorably to the ethics of honesty, traditional virtues, classical philology, a sense of history, collective memory, spontaneity, and communal feeling. Socialists, and the Left at large, rely on novelty. They are inclined to believe that the reform of all institutions is mandatory in the name of the future, including the Church and people’s view of it. Yet conservatives see the past as something of value and meaning in and of itself, and they stand for the preservation and cultivation of values and the good.

The French literary critic and historian Émile Faguet has accurately described conservatives as prophets of the past (see Nisbet, 1986). Nineteenth-century conservatives, from Edmund Burke to Comte Joseph Marie de Maistre and Louis Gabriel Ambroise, Vicomte de Bonald, were united by their aversion to the French Revolution and by their worship of feudalism and the Middle Ages. Overall, to imagine conservatism without aristocratic culture and the attendant clan of writers and historians of the classics is difficult. Scholars often simplify the genesis of British conservatism by alluding to the Tories alone. In doing so, they forget that Burke was a Whig, just as were such conservative writers as Thomas More and Jonathan Swift. But Swift spent time as a member of both parties and ridiculed them wholeheartedly in his *Gulliver’s Travels* (1726), even though the Whigs were once an important part of his life.

Conservatives differ the most from the socialists because of their deep ties to history and the classics. For socialists, the classics, especially the canon, are not their values. In their eyes, the classics and spiritual tradition do not guarantee progress or aid in the reform of the world by rational processes. In fact, the classics lead to the very opposite. No surprise that science and technology are priorities for the leftist rationalization of the world’s agenda. This time-honored value-and-idea orientation system dates back to nineteenth-century utopian socialism, especially to Christian-scientific socialism of the Saint-Simonian movement with its ideas of the necessity of a secular industrial faith.
This is one of the Left’s illusions. Religious and philosophical thought or, more precisely, the direction and drama of their interpretation, have inexorably found themselves at the forefront of rationalized science and technology in the West. The Left’s weakness as a whole has been its devaluation of religion and tradition, which is why socialists and leftist liberals are quite often unable to grasp essential aspects of European spiritual experience and even of modernity itself. But it does not follow that we hear only sharp dissonances between socialist and conservative rhetoricians in the tone of their discourse. Occasionally, we also hear completely harmonious compositions and consonances because socialist and conservative tendencies toward statism are quite close. At this point, socialism and conservatism close ranks.

The idea of a strong state underpinned by the organs of state control and strong communitarian feeling, with emphasis on the primacy of community over the individual who reproaches it, draws the two conflicting sides closer to each other. Usually they do not reflect on these commonalities or consciously grasp these points of mutual accord.

From this viewpoint, socialism and conservatism are equally alien to liberalism, which defends first individuals and their rights. An undisputed respect for private property and the acceptance of the role of the free market bring conservatism and liberalism closer together. This is completely natural because conservatism does not have its own economic ideology or doctrine but has had to borrow it from liberal economic theory. Neoconservatives, or “neocons,” in the United States are completely dependent on neoliberal economic doctrine. The classics have been the conservatives’ wellspring of strength, while the social sciences have been, and remain, the citadel of liberal thought.

So, conservatism is a self-contradictory, mottled, and colorful phenomenon. We can easily recognize within it the other voice of modernity. That voice echoes not a reaching back to the Enlightenment, as in the case of liberalism, but to Romanticism, which “rediscovered” the Middle Ages—the illustrious nations of old, history, all manner of things archaic, sentiments that draw eras nearer to one another, and numerous other forms and themes of modern political and moral sensibility.

Conservatism’s principal strength lies in its absolutely unyielding view of totalitarian ideologies and the political regimes born of them. This is because conservatism is the enemy of the project of radical modernization. Small wonder that throughout the twentieth century, British and American conservatives most vehemently and ardently opposed antihumanist theories and practices. Conservative thinkers, in their defense of “natural” communities, local sensibility, and cultures
rooted in history, commonly are quicker and more sensitive than liberal critics in ascertaining the forms of modern barbarity.

In Europe, liberalism was born as a modern social and political philosophy inseparable from moral philosophy and, in the case of the Scottish Enlightenment, from economic theory as well. If we take a quick gander at the influence of conservatism on scholarship, we see that social philosophy, and the social sciences overall, have never been a forte for conservatives. Conservatism can be understood correctly as the wellspring of classical studies par excellence. Conservatism would be unimaginable if bereft of the influence of classical philology, the entire cycle of “Greats” and Ancient history and literature. For this reason, conservatism is worthy of our attention and respect in our era of the crisis of humanism. The English conservative strain of thinking and imagination would be beyond analysis and research if we did not associate it with the great Victorian-era English essayists and writers, such as Matthew Arnold, Benjamin Disraeli, Rudyard Kipling, and G. K. Chesterton.

With good reason, H. G. Wells, in his preface to the 1935 edition of Thomas More’s *Utopia*, called its author a typical Whig, who, differently from the Tories, placed greater stock in rationality, science, and mathematically precise thought than in sentiment and imagination. Those familiar with More’s diatribes, parodies, and poetry would contest such a claim vigorously. I can tip some of my cards: My aim in this text is to rebuff the following claim by H. G. Wells: “Like any Whig, More exalted reason above the imagination at every point” (Wells, 1935, vii).

Europe’s conservatives traditionally upheld classical studies, that is, the preservation, promotion, and study of the classical languages, classical philosophy, history, and literature. Owing to their beliefs in the consolidating symbols of political community, nation, and state, and in the power of historical memory, conservatives naturally hovered toward classical values, giving priority to the *studia humanitatis* and the humanities overall. No surprise that England’s Tories were backed by writers concerned by the fate of the canon and its traditions in the modern world.

The forking of values and the ideological dividing line in the politics of European education and scholarship became clear in the nineteenth century. The Left’s intellectuals were inclined to rely on modern ideas and the supporting corpus of texts, especially those of the Enlightenment, while conservative politicians and thinkers sought to rehabilitate distant epochs and archaic layers of culture, not only the ancients but also the folklore, culture, and folk culture of the Middle Ages. In fact,
the rehabilitation of the Middle Ages is a conservative project in the deepest sense.

Where the partisans of the Left were more inclined to lean on modern critical authors who rejected the forms of thinking of the past as relics, fictions, and superstitions, those on the Right wanted to rekindle the past and placed greater stock in history and its study. Where the Left gave primacy to the natural sciences and to technological education in its projects for educational and scholarly development, seeking to broaden the idea of social development through rational planning and scientific control and coordination, the Right defended and stressed the role of spontaneity, imagination, and sentiment in the sphere of human upbringing.

This is why that some conservative thinkers tout mind over imagination as something ephemeral, unreliable, and irrational seems strange. The quintessence of the Left is the primacy it gives to the power of rational planning and coordination over the cultivation of feeling and spontaneity, whereas the Right always rushes to the defense of the unpredictability of the free human being. Therefore, we need not think in dichotomies or in the mechanical assignment of all writers and thinkers into liberal or conservative camps.

Recall those cases in which liberal writers, even ones with radical ideological and political viewpoints, had clear-cut conservative propensities that saw them defend their own cultural traditions. Such English writers as Rex Warner and George Orwell believed in socialism as the only alternative to fascism, imperialism, and colonialism, at the same time as they admired Victorian-era England and were veritable patriots of Albion and custodians of the canon and cultural tradition (see Tabachnick, 2002; Walzer, 1988).

In the constellation of modern ideas and values, we can describe liberalism as a theory of economics and the foundation of free market theory but it also implies a conservatism in the spheres of political and cultural tradition. Furthermore, people can be leftists politically yet hold conservative views regarding their lifestyle or their political community. For me, Sweden has always been the most fully formed example of this stance. It is a conservative country with regard to its institutions and traditions and is a constitutional monarchy; yet, for almost the entire twentieth century, it was ruled by Social Democrats and has been held up as the model of European socialism. I will later touch on the fact that pure conservatism in many cases is a myth that frequently brushes up against leftist attitudes with communitarianism, the concept of the common good, and the opposition of rationalism and the imagination.
Commonly, conservatives believe that a political doctrine is essential with regard to a stance on culture and morality. This is a mistake. No theory could be born without a confluence of mind and feeling informing an intellectual, political, and moral sensitivity. This moral sensitivity is instrumental in constructing alternatives to, and imagining or questioning critically, the social reality.

A moral imagination is required to construct a political theory. In the same manner, political categories would be dispossessed of their meaning without the sociocultural context in which we interpret concepts and experiences, such as left, right, reform, power, and justice. Each political doctrine becomes institutionalized and becomes a part of the sociopolitical process, thanks only to the existing configuration of ideas and values. One doctrine rejects this configuration of ideas and values, while another doctrine registers in the consciousness of the era. In most cases, cultural conservatism is a phenomenon strongly determined by social and existential experience.

Let me present an example of this. If I am an émigré living abroad, I will naturally incline toward left-leaning political figures, such as leftist liberals or Social Democrats, because they provide me with a field of moral and political sensitivity and an interpretive structure for me to grasp my own social and existential situation. For a first-generation immigrant to sign up for a conservatism that defends and represents local tradition would be highly improbable. In the absence of cultural codes and total assimilation into another society, to be accepted into a club of those who see their task as the safeguarding of the uniqueness of local tradition against the backdrop of the world would be impossible. Even in the event of successful assimilation, no guarantee exists of acceptance into that club. Acceptance into a culture and participation in ritual, to use Durkheim’s language, still does not open the structures of common sentiment and the key concepts in semantic fields. Without these, a total participation in another culture is impossible.

In well-known cases, left-leaning citizens of the former Soviet Union, having repatriated to Israel, went on to become extremely religious and conservative Jews. Conservatism in this case is revealed as the identification with that consciousness, tradition, and culture from which individuals feel they have received the substance of their moral personality.

The identification of the self with history does not necessarily mean a history that experienced personally or lived deeply. The same applies to the identification of the self with an “organic” community, which is not necessarily a community that has become a person’s concrete social reality and daily existence. Such a community can also be constructed
out of historical memory. Or it can be a part of an ideology, which allows us to organize our memory as individuals taking part in an environment of moral and political sentiment or collective memory that we find important.

If we reject the language of pure principles and apply a small amount of human experience to theory, this will inevitably bear witness to the facts that we have to face. That for the minority living in a foreign country to become sympathetically open to that country’s conservative political forces, not just voting for the local conservative party, is harder than hard. It is more than likely impossible.

Though they are rare, history knows exceptions and has seen an entire mythology grow up around them. The best-known exception is that of the Tory party leader and its greatest nineteenth-century inspiration Benjamin Disraeli, a Jew who became the standard-bearer of conservatism and prime minister of Great Britain. But Disraeli, as we know, cast mystery on his background and steadfastly constructed his own identity—of a friend to the aristocracy and a defender of tradition. In doing so, he cast himself as an opponent of brutal modernity with its expansion of science and technology and its industrial revolution. This identity was perceived accurately by Isaiah Berlin as the new uniform of the soul dictated by modernity itself, which helped such exceptional politicians as Disraeli and Walther Rathenau to resolve their identity problems, unlike the large majority of emancipated European Jews who were unable to do so (see Berlin, 2001, 252–86).

In the realm of political ideology, let us recall negative political conservatism’s essential dependence on liberalism. Without liberalism’s political philosophy and ideology, the conservative reactions to these would not exist either. Keeping in mind Isaiah Berlin’s term, which he applied to the philosophies of Vico, Herder, and others in the post-Enlightenment era, that of the “Counter-Enlightenment,” then we can call conservatism, as a theoretical and ideological project, “counterliberalism.” Because, if we were to reject its confrontation with liberalism, conservatism would be nothing other than a cultural attachment to a canon, traditions, political institutions, and a historically tested model of social and moral order.

The “purified” conservatism as perfectly antithetical to liberalism and socialism sounds like an ideological construct disconnected from political reality. As a blueprint for a social and moral order and as a mode of modern sensitivity, conservatism must enter politics capable of guaranteeing the proper functioning of modern political institutions. All members of modern society who have a coherent set of views would reveal most likely their worldview as a combination of
bits and pieces of the three principal political ideologies: Liberalism, conservatism, and socialism.

The predominance of one of its ingredients would determine the final consistency of this cocktail. The Roman Catholic Church’s social doctrine is likely the best example of how to absorb segments of modern political ideology into a new historical perspective and overall Christian social and moral philosophy. A concept of human rights exists in this doctrine, developed from natural law, which was raised to an exceptional conceptual and spiritual rank by Pope John Paul II. The concept of human rights, along with the defense of the dignity and autonomy of the individual, connects the Church’s social doctrine with liberalism at its exit point and with its values.

But this doctrine contains commonalities, such as morality as a conscious sociality, the preeminence of a social sensitivity formed on the basis of love, along with a general accentuation of communitarian values, which cause this doctrine to broach more than one socialist position. In the end, the monumentality of the faith-and-doctrine-supporting institutions and the accentuation of the specific historical value of Christian historical experience, together with the idea of the defense of faith against the uncertainties of modernity, bind this doctrine harmoniously to political conservatism.

Bauman has accurately discussed, as one of the illusions of modernity, the conviction that we can confront or defend modernity from the pure past or, in the words of Max Weber, thanks to upholding of the eternal yesterday. In truth, conservatism in political practice most often implies the application of the selfsame logic of participation in the reform of the world and the obedience to modernity’s logic as liberalism. Neither is capable of leaving the world in the same state in which they found it. Conservatism believes in the unknown and, in the best of cases, in unpredictable value of restoring the past, while liberalism often speaks in the name of a future that is completely unknowable and unforeseeable. The essence remains the same: The world cannot be left in peace; something must be done with it (see Bauman, 2005).

As Bauman has noted,

Under such circumstances, the conservatives who assert that they wish to defend the nation from pressures to change and preserve it in its present and already perfect shape or go back to the lost tradition and “ancient values,” and the liberals, who want their nation to endlessly improve, to correct its mistakes and to apologize for its misdeeds—are much in the same position. Both believe that something is wrong
and may even get worse if nothing is done. In other words, both are
dissatisfied with the status quo, both think that it leaves much to be
desired and both are convinced that it calls for urgent repairs. Both the
conservatives and the liberals must keep busy and none can allow their
vigilance to lapse. The building of a nation never ends, and the right
moment to disarm and rest on laurels never comes. (ibid., xi)

In the contemporary world, the purity of conservatism’s ideology
and philosophy reminds me of a teenager. Immature, angry, given to
histrionics, thinking in terms of Manichaean dichotomies, furiously
attacking liberal theory and its practices, yet the collective teenager
is incapable of constructing an independent and critical relationship
with its own institutional environment or its theoretical tradition. If
we were to compare such a stance of conservatism with that of an
individual, we would see that conservatism is often hindered by a cog-
nitive dissonance. The essence of this cognitive dissonance lies in the
existence of an element of unabsorbed consciousness and tortuous
self-experience that acts as if to motivate critically but, in the end,
remains explained by no one and which does not reveal the disposi-
tion of the ideas and values it criticizes.

The crudest brand of conservatism is that whereby an elementary
conformity along with a rejection of independent thinking has been
raised to the level of a virtue. It was all done in the belief that behind
us stand such institutions and power of symbolic authority in the face
of which the possession of a clear viewpoint would be considered
unabashedly arrogant and rude. The crudest form of liberalism, which
is essentially a caricature of itself, is deservedly blasted into smither-
eens by conservative commentators, and by liberals themselves, for
the absurdity of its political correctness and the new secular ortho-
doxoy that it is creating.

Conservatism scores its biggest gains when it is in opposition to
liberalism but also to other political doctrines and ideologies. When
it crosses over onto the symbolic construction of reality, or into the
active institutionalization of socioeconomic and sociopolitical reality,
political conservatism quickly betrays its eclecticism and lack of inde-
pendence. It would be more than naïve to begin demonstrating that
conservatives do not do this and only uphold traditions and institu-
tions. Suffice to recall Margaret Thatcher’s reforms in Great Britain.
Political conservatism’s eclecticism is best revealed in the instances of
all manner of “right revolutions,” from Thatcherism to the neocon-
servatives (“neocons”) in the United States.
In the economic sphere, conservatism depends on the doctrine of neoliberalism and the concept of the minimal state. Therefore, a conservative is differentiated from a right-leaning liberal not by the economic and political project, but by the difference in its interpretation and the emphasis of its religious and moral role in society. The essential difference between neoconservatives in the United States and right-leaning liberals (traditional and conservative liberals) is in the views of the neocons on religion, the family, abortion, homosexuality, and related matters.

This is why it is unfitting to apply modern criticism and moralizing to political conservatism. If we agree with Anthony Giddens’s idea that capitalism is the most concentrated expression of institutional modernity (see Giddens, 1997), we would also have to admit that conservatism is no less deserving of merit than liberalism in the economic and political spheres of modernity.

Contrary to its rhetoric, conservatism does not in any way seek, in the economic and political realms, only to maintain its centuries-old institutions and preserve its fragile social reality from brutal interventions by liberalism and all manner of social engineering. Such an explanation would remind us not of a political discourse but of a children’s tale. Conservatism is constantly changing reality, further heightening and provoking the tensions of modernity. Because the logic of conservatism’s symbolic authority leans on the union of power and faith, it must constantly perfect its instrumentarium of power, which also includes the discourse of power for it to preserve faith or the configuration of ideology, values, and ideas.

The best way to define conservatism is to expose its reaction to the revolution brought on by modernity in the sphere of ideas and values. Reflexive conservatism is born together with suspicion of the perfectibility of this new world, and suspicion of the promises to create a more viable blueprint for a social and moral order than that based on traditions and time-tested experience. Conservatism is one of the most interesting phenomena of the moral imagination, without which we would have no criticism of the modern world, as much in philosophy as in literature and the humanistic and social studies overall. Conservatism is a critical reflex of modernity and a criticism of various worldwide scenarios of rationalization and modernization. Authentic conservatism is nothing less than modernity’s other face.

If we compare modernity with Janus, the two-faced god of limitation in Roman mythology, we could say that one of its faces represents change, chaos, confusion, havoc, reform, world renewal, re-creation, and the project and promise of the identification with a person’s
political will. The liberal imagination could be associated with that face. But this second face looks insistently to the canon, intransigent rules, higher powers, a sanctioned social and moral order, which seeks to rescue the world from destruction by chaos and change. If it can no longer save that higher and primary order, then this face has to remind us of what was there at the origin, to describe that reality and thereby to rescue it.

Conservatism does not deny all of modernity, but only the cultural logic, trajectories of consciousness, and political trends that it holds to be dangerous and destructive. The conservative imagination encompasses Renaissance utopias, travel literature, works of political fantasy, and modern dystopias, Kulturkritik, along with a large part of social and cultural philosophy aimed against twentieth-century politics and culture. In this regard, associative links undoubtedly exist among such seemingly disparate purveyors of the conservative moral imagination as Étienne Gilson, Jacques Maritain, Oswald Spengler, José Ortega y Gasset, Arnold J. Toynbee, Lewis Mumford, Leo Strauss, and Eric Voegelin.

We can associate these thinkers, who uncovered the destructive logic of modernity leading the world to totalitarianism, with such left-leaning writers as Yevgeny Zamyatin, George Orwell, Arthur Koestler, and Rex Warner. This is not just a concord of personalities or unexpected combination of political sentiments. Instead, this is the very logic of criticism of the modern world, which manifests itself in various forms. Conservatism, especially cultural conservatism, is impossible without the “tragic imagination.” The liberal imagination is often described as the imagination of freedom and modernization or the imagination of the rationalization of the world (see Trilling, 1957, 1967). The term “cultural conservatism” sounds like a pleonasm because authentic conservatism is nothing other than a radical point of division between politics and culture, which would work to the detriment of political liberalism and reduce it to the simplest form of political reaction.

**Capitalism without Democracy? Free Market without Political Liberty?**

Polish Solidarity proved invincible, it has been argued, precisely because the proletarian state had no antidote against a working-class movement that ballooned into the decisive factor in driving political change. Regrettably, the once majestic Solidarity has shrunk to a shadow of the political force it once was, mired in outbursts of anger and frustration.
So what happened? The greatest paradox in history: Labor fought for capitalism. The working class was instrumental in the demise of the Working Class State, as it was in the abandonment of Marxism-Leninism. Whether we are in agreement with Ken Jowitt who, in his *New World Disorder* (Jowitt, 1993), takes Leninism as a “civilization,” we have to admit that the transition of Eastern Europe from the state-controlled economy to the free-market-based economy was a far more complex and painful process than we could have imagined.

As a surgically precise analysis of the Solidarity, in David Ost’s *The Defeat of Solidarity: Anger and Politics in Postcommunist Europe* (2005), suggests, the open-ended and liberal-spirited Solidarity proved invincible precisely because the State of the Proletariat had no effective antidote against the working-class movement and against the labor force that became the decisive factor in the national independence movement. Regrettably, the then majestic and epic Solidarity was bound to end up in recent political manifestations of anger and frustration, each time showing up as just a shadow of the political force it once was.

David Ost finds himself agreeing with Ken Jowitt who, as mentioned, in his *New World Disorder*, takes Leninism as a “civilization”—a move close to Immanuel Wallerstein’s search for a clue to socialism and capitalism as separate civilizations. Having agreed with Jowitt on “rational impersonalism” as the essence of liberal capitalism and as its principal weakness, Ost aptly describes civilizations as the “entire existential systems” whose demise “is a time not only for political upheaval but also for enormous emotional upheaval” (Ost, 2005, 5). Leninism, as Jowitt and Ost have it, provided enough emotional energy to give sense to one’s existence and to have a grasp of life. This energy was invaluable for the working class to fight Leninism itself—but the point is that liberal capitalism lacks this energy and does not provide for the “essential group needs and dimensions of human existence” (ibid., 6).

Ost shows that the demise of Communism, oddly enough, left the Solidarity and the entire Polish society without left-wing values. The embodiment of the Left, that is, the workers, started acting against their own, one would think, raison d’être. The outcome was to come later on. The new elites of post-Communist Europe emerged, the elites preoccupied with their new social roles, power, and prestige, and least concerned with the rights and political representation of the underrepresented and underprivileged—no matter if a significant part of the elite comes from the former Communist party, for now they are the new entrepreneurs. As far as the working class is concerned, as an object of political debate, it is just words, words, words. The
picture is quite familiar to anyone from post-Communist Europe. At this point, labor is not the only force that substantially loses during such upheavals and transformations, as Ost argues. The entire political culture of a given society loses. This is more than true regarding the rise of populism in Eastern Europe over the past five years. Nothing should surprise us here, for populism fills the intellectual vacuum and the political and moral void of post-Communism.

Of the relationship between modernity and anger, Ost writes,

That capitalism inexorably generates anger became clear to social scientists a long time ago. In fact, the effort to explain social anger lies at the very foundation of social science. What else, Albert Hirschman asks, are the concepts of “alienation, anomie, ressentiment, Vermassung, class struggle” but attempts to make sense of the “passionate anger, fear, and resentment” that capitalism and modernity were so obviously creating? . . . The link between capitalism and anger is particularly clear in early capitalist societies, such as nineteenth century Western Europe or postcommunist Eastern Europe, when poverty abounds and notions of radical individualism still ring unfair to those raised on communitarian sensibilities. In its early days capitalism not only produces deteriorating economic outcomes for a great many people, but seems to those people as contrary to prevailing notions of justice. This seems to be a universal truth. Studies of early capitalist societies, whether in Europe, North America, southeast Asia, or South Africa, always show strong social resistance to the onsets of a market society. (ibid., 22–23)

More than anything, we could not have imagined that the nature of privatization in post-Soviet countries would actually undermine the development of liberal-democratic politics. A political and moral void opened, depriving these countries of any familiar objects of social and political identification and of left-wing values and the idea of social justice. The old nomenklatura made its victorious return to the political and economic stage as the new class of entrepreneurs and managers. They manufactured “new” social-democratic or socialist parties devoid of the faintest signs of left-wing sensitivity.

Much the same happened to the new right-wing parties that bestowed the names of conservatism and liberalism on themselves, yet remain far more inclined to social engineering or political maneuvering all over the spectrum than to defending civil and political liberties. It is a familiar picture to anyone from post-Communist Europe: Preoccupied with their new social roles, power, and prestige, the new elites, made up in significant part of erstwhile communists, feel scant concern for the rights and political representation of the underrepresented and
underprivileged. Labor is not the only force to have lost much during the upheavals and transformations in Eastern Europe. The entire political culture of these societies is a loser. A compelling example is seen in the rise of populism in the region over the past five years. Not that we should be surprised by this, for populism is filling the intellectual vacuum and the political and moral emptiness of post-Communism.

Was there any alternative? Could it have been possible to open economies to private capital while keeping the wild and semicriminal capitalists at bay? For the variety of capitalism that prevails in much of the region now is far from politically innocent or neutral. Ungrounded in civil society and unsupportive of it, the child of privatization remains to be reconciled with the logic of democratic politics and political pluralism. If they wish to soften the further consequences, the elites of Eastern Europe will have to reorient capital’s allegiance from serving the political power structures to acting for the benefit of civil society.

Anders Åslund’s *How Capitalism Was Built: The Transformation of Central and Eastern Europe, Russia, and Central Asia* (2007) comes as an eye-opener. The rejection of socialism, no matter whether orthodox and even totalitarian or with a human face, in favor of the capitalist revolution, is one of the most striking and decisive political events in modern history. Yet we would deceive ourselves by describing it as the new “end of history” and as a universal tendency toward freedom and liberal democracy.

In this book, Åslund, a Swedish economist known for his work in the post-Soviet sphere, covers a vast territory of economic, social, and political change from Central and Eastern Europe to Russia and Central Asia. A comparative and historical perspective, successfully combined with analysis of socioeconomic and political change, allows him access to specific aspects of politics in Eastern and Central Europe. He has since looked specifically at the Russian transformation in *Russia’s Capitalist Revolution: Why Market Reform Succeeded and Democracy Failed*.

The Soviet Union’s collapse and the breakdown of Communism as a world system were experienced differently in different parts of Communism’s zone of influence and power. “Each country experienced its own unique demise of communism,” Åslund remarks (Åslund, 2007, 20). As Åslund reminds us, some countries have successfully democratized their political system; others had more success in building a free-market economy at the expense of political liberty, democracy, and human rights.

The author gives short shrift to those naïve and predictable exponents of modernization theory who still argue that economic freedom
goes hand in hand with political liberty. This is certainly not the case in a number of post-Soviet countries, as Åslund notes, where, on the contrary, economic liberalization and capitalism, combined with remnants of the same old political class, paved the way for authoritarian rule or pseudodemocracy. In Russia, where democratic practices could be installed in the context of the intimidation of the opposition, the political choice is between two or more false options, each equally controlled by the establishment.

Yes, Russia does have a multiparty system, albeit distorted by authoritarian rule and pseudodemocratic practices. Noting this, Åslund assumes that post-Soviet societies turned away from the Chinese scenario of economic reform as prior and superior to political liberalization and democratization. Following Åslund’s analysis, we can safely assume that had the Soviet Union followed the Chinese path it would have ended up in total disaster. Mikhail Gorbachev, having initiated the reform of the Soviet political system, intended to deal a blow to the nomenklatura before it could undermine the restructuring movement by blocking and burying any attempts to liberalize the economy.

Describing the choice between democracy and authoritarianism, Åslund points out that the new political leaders and forces in the countries that broke away from the Soviet Union did not have enough time to grow and mature in terms of democratic experience, precisely because of the sudden collapse of the Soviet Union preceded by the old guard’s attempt to seize back power in 1991. Ironically, the more suddenly the old system collapsed, the greater the role of the old establishment because the liberal opposition had little time to evolve. Democracy never had a chance in Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Kazakhstan, where the old rulers stayed in power, merely casting off their Communist cloaks.

Åslund shows how intense were the debates among domestic and foreign political scientists and economists in the first years of democratic rule:

The idea that democracy was the preserve of the West and countries of high economic development was deeply embedded in modernization theory, whose leading representative is Samuel Huntington. As late as 1992, he argued that “authoritarian governments are better positioned than democratic governments to promote economic liberalization” . . . When transition started, many argued that the preconditions for democracy had to be built first. A premature move to democracy could hinder growth by increasing the influence of special interest groups and fostering political instability . . . This idea of benign authoritarianism is
According to Åslund, economic and social analysts had long debated and strongly disagreed over whether democracy or authoritarianism is a better way to economic liberalization. Some reasoned that a temporary dictatorship was needed to introduce market forces. He labels the most extreme advocates of authoritarian modernization the “Pinochet school”—“a key argument for the Chinese model”—after the Chilean example. “Not surprisingly, the Pinochet argument has been more popular among old communists . . . and Russian industrialists than among supporters of a liberal market economy,” he says, but even “some Russian economic liberals have called for a Russian Pinochet” (ibid., 209).

Echoing Max Weber in the historic debate concerning the origins of modern economic life, its structure, and the institutional expression of modernity in particular, we could plausibly suggest that capitalism in Anglo American countries cannot be easily equated to capitalism, say, in India or South America. The same reasoning would suggest caution in comparing the economic systems of the modern Baltic states to capitalism in Russia. Tempting as it may be, we should not overgeneralize these differences. If pushed to the limit where nuances disappear and only a blank “yes” or “no” holds, I would argue that even in the Baltic states capitalism proved much stronger than democratic politics. That a large company can orchestrate a state’s domestic policies or that the choice in parliamentary or presidential elections can come down to two favorites of two rivals in the same corporate world of a small country, we learn from present-day Lithuania. We need not go as far as the post-Soviet states east of the European Union frontier to put the hypothesis that capitalism supports democracy to the test.

However, capitalism can hardly claim to have received much popular support in these countries, including in the Baltic republics. Had Åslund devoted part of this book to an analysis of the national variants of capitalism in the wide region he looks at and asked whether public opinion and intellectual culture see capitalism as a liberating force or a tool in the arenas of power, contributing nothing to civil society and democracy, his study would have gained even harder currency in comparative studies of modernity in Europe and beyond. The reemergence of capitalism signified the arrival of a new era. It was, and continues to be, central in the transformation of Central and Eastern Europe, Russia, and Central Asia. But it is far too soon to start up the funeral music for tyranny and totalitarianism. Capitalism is a promise
of and a key to modernity and power, rather than a passport to political liberty and democracy.

As mentioned, Anthony Giddens characterized capitalism as merely the most complete institutional form or expression of modernity. I would add that capitalism should not be burdened with the task of shouldering a moral vision for humanity, let alone the mission of being humanity’s redeeming force. However, capitalism, which had long been presented in Soviet high school textbooks as the major menace to humankind, now seems more aggressive and dynamic in post-Soviet societies than in far more moderate, timid, egalitarian, social-democratic, welfare-state-orientated, and post-capitalist Western European countries.

The Laboratory of Change

Sweden and other Nordic countries, for instance, can only marvel at what they perceive as a sort of old-fashioned, historically recycled and ruthless capitalism of the Baltics or, to put in more conventional terms, the libertarian economy of Estonia and other Baltic countries. The countries that used to symbolize to Soviet citizens the embodiment of “wild capitalism,” with its overt glorification of the winners and contempt for the losers, now appear to them as astonishingly communitarian, warm, and humane.

Indeed, they are pure and innocent compared with the “first come first served,” “grab the stolen,” or “catch it all” type of mentality that paradoxically, albeit logically, blends with a sort of Marxism turned upside down—this extremely vulgar variety of economic determinism and materialism in Eastern Europe barely surprises those who know quite well that culture is the last thing expected to be named among priorities there. Although quite a few pay lip service to culture without considering how to foster intellectual dialogue among countries, somehow almost everybody agrees there that the West has to pay for “the culture, uniqueness and spirituality” of post-totalitarian countries—generous grants in exchange for suffering and unique experience.

Eastern European countries seem locked mentally somewhere between the discovery of the intrinsic logic of capitalism characteristic of the nineteenth century and post–Weimar Republic period—an incredibly fast economic growth and a passionate advocacy of the values of free enterprise and capitalism, accompanied by a good deal of anomie, fission of the body social, stark social contrasts, shocking degree of corruption, culture of poverty (to recall Oscar Lewis’s term
that refers to low trust, self-victimization, disbelief in social ties and networks, contempt for institutions, etc.), and cynicism.

If we want to imagine a blend of nineteenth- and twentieth-century phenomena of consciousness, politics, and culture, then we can safely assume that our postmodern and posttotalitarian era proved capable of squeezing two centuries of uninterrupted European history within one decade of the “transition” of the Baltic states and other East/Central European countries from the planned economy of Communism to free-market economy and global capitalism. In a way, Eastern Europe appears to have become a kind of laboratory where the speed of social change and cultural transformation could be measured and tested. Indeed, the Baltic countries and their societies are far ahead of what we know as the grand historical narrative or, plainly, predictable and moralizing history; nay, these societies are faster than history.

They are faster than history, yet slower than a lifetime. People often complain here that their lives and careers have been ruined by this rapid social change and grand transformation. They take it as a tragedy arguing (and not without reason) that their lives, energies, and works have been wasted if not completely spoiled. A lifetime of a human being proves insufficient to witness a thrilling and sweeping transformation of society.

Vytautas Kavolis worked out a theory of postmodernism as an attempt to reconcile what has been separated by modernity. At the same time, the idea of postmodernism served, for Kavolis, as an interpretive framework for the split between the modernist and the anti-modernist. He accorded the concept of the postmodern to the process of desovietization, too:

“If desovietization, in its diversity of forms, continues relatively unhindered and does not become complacent with its own rhetoric, it has the potentiality of becoming a first-rate (that is, “enriching”) civilizational movement. italicize post in postmodern can still be retrieved from the cultists who have made it a monopoly of their own exuberance, desovietization could even be considered, in some of its cultural emphases, as “postmodern.” (I conceive of the “post-modern” not as anti-modernist, but as the building of bridges between the “modernist” and the “anti-modernist.”) (Kavolis, 1995, 166)

Indeed, modernity has come to split up the human world. How to react to the challenge of modernity? How to accept it? How to reconcile and bridge what have been ruthlessly separated by modernity: Truth and value; rationality and emotional intimacy; expertise
and sensitivity; hierarchy and equality/individualism; tradition and innovation; the classic canon and the released creative experiment; metaphysics and science; a particular individual and community; a particular community and universal humanity?

Up to now, modernity in Western Europe was supplying a theory to explain the world around us; the point is that Eastern Europe has changed the world, becoming more than a theory-emanating entity. Eastern Europe is a laboratory of change and a vast area of side effects and damage inflicted by modernity on the world. As such, it still supplies empirical evidence to the West to judge the second, or liquid, modernity, squeezed and condensed here in less than two decades.

As Kavolis points out,

The Soviet Union has for seventy years endeavored to produce a new civilization by establishing a secular version of the religion-above-culture paradigm as its center. The result was a pattern most similar, among contemporary civilizations, to that of the Islamic world, except that (1) italicize secular placed in the position of superordination to all culture, and (2) this secular religion was, in contrast to Islam, not deeply embedded in the attitudes of the “masses” or the “intellectual elites.” It therefore has remained an artificial entity, not a “genuine civilization” capable of attracting adherence even without the use of violence; a failed effort in a boundary region of the West to become a civilizational alternative to it . . . This pattern has now collapsed. But will Eastern Europe move toward the modern West, in which ontological hierarchy has been replaced, beginning in the seventeenth century, by a polymorphous political-moral-aesthetic polylogue as the main integrative device? Or will Eastern Europe remain a culturally distinctive region, with another, perhaps more “traditionalist,” ontological hierarchy acquiring hegemony? (ibid., 153–54)

Again, this is a mode of existence that is difficult to describe otherwise than to suggest that it is faster than history, yet slower than a lifetime.
Chapter 4

Us and Them

Nationalism and Patriotism Revisited

Nationalism is patriotism disliked and patriotism, nationalism liked.

—Bernard Yack, cited in Zygmunt Bauman, Liquid Modernity

The Grandeur and Misery of Nationalism

In the eyes of antimodernists, whether conservative or radical, modernity is a liability. It is open to the charge of uprooting individuals and peoples, depriving them of a sense of history, tradition, fellowship, human relationship, and faith. Yet some scholars insist on the substantial difference between the two basic notions of nationhood and citizenship, a difference that shaped political consciousness of Europe. They draw the dividing line between what they take as the French version of modern citizenship, or citizenship based on the *jus soli* (the right of territory) principle, and the German version of it that rests on the *jus sanguinis* (the right of family) principle (see Brubaker, 1992, 1999; Greenfeld, 1992). Both lead to a kind of modern mystique, though.

Whereas the *jus soli* principle is instrumental in establishing nearly a mystical relationship between identity and territory, the latter being seen as shaping and determining the former, the *jus sanguinis* principle seeks an in-depth explanation of identity. In so doing, the proponents of the *jus sanguinis* logic try to derive such an explanation from the mysterious substance of history and from the depths of community—family, language, and culture.
Although scholars tend to view the *jus soli* cultural logic, emphasizing its more or less liberal political and moral implications—and quite justifiably so, given the blood-and-soil mystique present in the *jus sanguinis* cultural logic—the principles have a sort of common denominator. The essence of them both lies in the assumption that something exists behind us, something that shapes us in terms of our belonging to something larger than ourselves—it can be preestablished designs of selfhood, such as history, language, culture, tradition, or collective identity.

The modern concepts of citizenship appear to rest on the metaphysics of secularized hierophany, or the manifestation of the sacred, to use the term employed by Mircea Eliade (see Eliade, 1961). Adding a pivotal qualification to Eliade’s idea that while premodern societies lived in a sacralized cosmos, modern societies live in a desacralized one (the assertion, which, in essence, is undeniably true), we might well suggest that the manifestation of the sacred survived into the modern world as secularized hierophany. Interestingly, the emergence of secularized hierophany is manifest in a derivative, albeit reverse, tendency overlooked by Eliade and other students of comparative religions—in sacralization of some aspects of what unquestionably represents the realm of the profane—language, culture, history, and tradition.

Hence, the propensity to accord some undertones of the sacred and religiosity to history and culture. The modern myth of spirituality as something that results from the principle of culture, the latter being contrasted to the principle of civilization with its skepticism, cynicism, spirit of science and technology, and lack of depth and creativity, is the outcome of this reversal. It was through this complementarity between the secularization of the sacred and the sacralization of the profane that language, history, and culture were all conceived of by modern philosophers as forces shaping individual and collective forms of human existence.

Nationalism and other modern philosophies of history and culture became possible through this trajectory of consciousness. History, with a capital *H*, becomes a symbolic design within which modern individuals seek frames of meaning and concepts to explain themselves and the world around them, in the ordinary moments of their lives and in critical junctures of history. Culture, with a capital *C*, for its part, has been transformed into a kind of self-sufficient, self-asserting, and unique monad of history, a self-contained and mysterious substance that generated creative energy, vitality, spirituality, and meaning of human existence. Hypostatized to the level of autonomous and independent existence, culture was eventually divorced from other
faculties of human experience and provinces of the soul, which were ascribed to another pole, civilization.

Vytautas Kavolis defines nationalism in the following way:

Nationalism is a conception of the cultural identity of a nation which becomes a mobilizing political program even when the nation is ... in the process of being invented. National identity is what, unless it is either culturally put into question or politically endangered, does not need to be explicitly declared about one’s sense of being more at home in one this-worldly community of participation and historical experience than in any other. The close alignment of culture with politics is perhaps the most general source of the dangers which nationalism has presented not only to the world, but to the members of the nations it sought to represent, to revive, or to “build.” This alignment gives to nationalism a deeper, quasi-religious kind of power, an ability to overwhelm, which “normal” political forces generally lack. It leads to the exploitation of culture by politics. (Kavolis, 1991, 134)

In his short, sharp, and precise formulations regarding the symbolic codes and the structures of meaning within nationalism, Kavolis reveals what other theories of nationalism are missing. Not only does Kavolis show the modernizing and liberal potential of nationalism, at the same time clearly pointing out its dubious and dangerous points that largely depend on the political, historical, and cultural context within which a given nation or community builds or revives itself, but he also shows the similarity between nationalism and other civilization-shaping movements, from Romanticism to Feminism. Kavolis succeeded where other students of nationalism failed. From the point of view of the link between theoretical sophistication and empirical evidence in viewing nationalism as a major civilization-shaping force, Kavolis far surpasses other theorists of nationalism.

Democracy in particular benefits from loosening the connections between culture and politics ... Like religion, national identity operates optimally in a democratic setting ... In nineteenth-century Germany and Eastern Europe and the present-day Near East, nationalism tends toward the archaic. American nationalism and, to a lesser extent, mainstream French nationalism since the Revolution have been modernizing. The crucial issue in distinguishing modernizing from archaic nationalism is whether one derives society from individuals having “human rights” or perceives individuals as embodiments of the “collective soul” of the nation. (ibid., 134–35)
In his thorough analysis of the four types of nationalism (archaic, modernizing, antimodernistic, and postmodern), Kavolis describes Central and Eastern Europe as a laboratory of the diverse trajectories of the “modernization of nationalisms.” “In Central Europe, Hungarian nationalism has probably changed most since 1939, toward the modernistic model, Yugoslav nationalisms have changed least” (ibid., 135). Interestingly, the difference between conservative nationalism and liberal nationalism is still overlooked by the current social sciences and critical scholarship in general. As noted, liberal nationalism allows room for cosmopolitan stances and multiculturalism in politics and public discourse, as well as the modernizing critique of politics and culture it employs.

Whatever its guise, nationalism is inseparable from what we describe as “national identity,” a phenomenon that “was from the start, and remained for a long time, an agonistic notion and a battle cry” (Bauman, 2004, 21). In terms of power as a force to name the segments of reality and to translate our terms into social practices, legitimizing and institutionalizing the interpretation of ourselves and the world around us, modern identity comes in several faces. The trinity of modern secular power, deeply intertwined with identity politics, starts, in early modernity, with the old good rule *cuius regio, eius religio* (he who rules decides the religion). Then the time comes for the rule *cuius regio, eius lingua* (he who rules decides the language; see Plasseraud, 2000, 13–15), which paves the way for the rule *cuius regio, eius natio* (he who rules decides the nationality; see Bauman, 2004, 21).

However insightful, the authors of general theories of nationalism—in particular, Ernest Gellner, Eric Hobsbawm, Anthony Smith, and Benedict Anderson—failed to take into account the importance of national cultures for the political and institutional settings for liberal democracy and the enormous modernizing potential of Central/East European nationalism. Finally, they overlooked the ethic of liberal nationalism and its implications for public discourse and social criticism. The merits of liberal nationalism in disclosing totalitarianism are too obvious to emphasize. It suffices to recall Czeslaw Milosz, Václav Havel, Milan Kundera, Tomas Venclova, and other eminent Central European critics of totalitarianism, ideocracy, xenophobia, and manipulative exchanges.

George Orwell’s piece of philosophical writing, his thoughtful essay “Notes on Nationalism,” rather than his remarkable dystopias, gives us a clue to the origins of ideological and political fanaticism. Not having found a better word to describe this disturbing phenomenon of the twentieth century, Orwell employs “nationalism,” which
means here something radically different from what the scholars of nationalism, safely distanced from their subject and equipped with conventional wisdom, would have meant when discussing it.

By nationalism, Orwell means the habit of assuming that human beings can be easily classified like insects and that millions of people can be lightly and confidently labeled “good” or “bad.” Yet even a more important trait of nationalism is our habit of identifying with a single nation or other unit, no matter whether real or imagined, placing it beyond good and evil, and doing our utmost to advance its interests and to give it as much power and prestige as possible. Orwell also adds that nationalism should not be confused with patriotism. Although both words are used in so vague a manner that any definition is liable to be challenged, but the difference between two opposing ideas calls for a sharp dividing line between nationalism and patriotism (see Orwell, 1970, 155).

Nationalism can easily be defended against Orwell’s devastating criticism. For instance, what he describes as a propensity to place our object of devotion and affection beyond good and evil and to recognize no other duty than that of advancing our group or nation’s interests concerns conservative and radical nationalism rather than liberal nationalism. Nationalism could be advocated by reminding ourselves of myriad ways it manifests itself.

Liberal nationalism, the initial phase of nationalism in the first half of the nineteenth century, could be taken as just another term for liberalism itself. Johann Gottfried von Herder’s idea that every culture is a self-asserting, self-sufficient, unique, and irreplaceable collective individual cannot be conceived here otherwise than as another version, German or Central European, of liberalism. Liberal nationalism has always been, and continues to be, an interpretive and normative framework for the critical questioning of society and culture rather than a blind and deaf glorification of history. As a social and moral philosophy, liberal nationalism established a pattern of intellectual culture, whose essence lies in the modernizing critique of society and culture. Liberal and democratic nationalism sustains our modern intellectual and moral sensibilities.

How ironic that by lightly discarding nationalism as a whole, Orwell dismisses his substantial contribution to the modern democratic world, namely, the struggle against totalitarianism. Yet he had not foreseen this sort of nationalism, whose merits in the struggle against totalitarianism were to mark the political history of twentieth-century Central and Eastern Europe (see Donskis, 2002). Regrettably, in the second half of the nineteenth century, nationalism in Europe
was increasingly defensive, mass-oriented, ideological, and doctrinal. It seems to have been because of the effect of Social Darwinism, and because of strong antimodernist reactions, which capitalized on the idea of the defense of the nation from external and internal enemies. In many cases, nationalism became primitive and “zoological.” However, this has not always been so.

In the first half of the nineteenth century, Europe was full of liberal nationalists who maintained the ideas of universal brotherhood and sisterhood, human fellowship, moral reciprocity, commitment, and sympathetic understanding. They firmly believed that the fight for the independence and freedom of any country was a common cause. As Ernest Gellner noted, liberalism and nationalism, in the nineteenth century, were allies, even brothers; only later, would their paths diverge (see Gellner, 1996a).

The epoch of the springtime of the peoples, and Herder’s noble-spirited and generous philosophy of culture, is out of touch with what we can depict as the blood-and-soil, ethnic-cleansing brand of nationalism. If we are not to conflate National Socialism, as a global racist ideology and as a blueprint for a world order, with nationalism, then we have to admit that a widespread propensity to blame all evils of the twentieth century solely on nationalism is out of place. The ethics of liberal nationalism was instrumental in morally discrediting and, consequently, politically dismantling totalitarianism. Moreover, conservative nationalism, in Communist countries, played a crucial role, advocating such fundamental forms of human rights and dignity as freedom of speech, conscience, association, and the practice of religion and culture.

This is not to say that all forms of nationalism are compatible with the ideals of peace and democracy. As a para-ideology, nationalism proved adaptable to all principal modern ideologies, namely, conservatism, liberalism, and socialism. This fact makes nationalism a vague phenomenon of modern politics and culture. As Orwell admits, every definition of nationalism is doomed to be incomplete. If so, every definition of nationalism is liable to be challenged. One reason is that “nationalism” cannot in principle function as an abstract and polysemantic term. By making it so, we deprive the term “nationalism” of any sense. This is to say that we would make no sense by disconnecting nationalism from an ideological framework within which it comes to define identity, freedom, tradition, power, authority, virtue, and other key phenomena of politics and culture in whose name it speaks up.

At the same time, to detach nationalism from a concrete political setting in which it operates is an unpardonable mistake. In a liberal
democracy, nationalism can be integrated into the liberal moral culture and thus accommodated in the pluralist setting. This is not exclusively the case. Even in a liberal democracy, nationalism can be adjusted to, or translated into, a set of racist and xenophobic sentiments, antimodernist reactions, or the illiberal systems of moralization, such as the culture of determinism. In undemocratic regimes, nationalism can be translated into any kind of predominant militant rhetoric or symbolic design of political and ideological partisanship. As a frame of reference for blood-and-soil mystique, nationalism can be incorporated into the general pattern of hatred and paranoia instigated by politically, ideologically, or religiously motivated hate groups, whatever their guise. To deal with nationalism without defining its ideological framework and political setting is either pointless or unfair.

How important is the setting within which nationalism comes into existence and operates we can learn from different patterns of nationalism, which are closely connected to a given society’s traditions, religiosity, historical injuries, or moral traumas. As Ralph Fevre suggests, “Nationalism is more of a reaction to the threat of over-rationalization than to its actual occurrence. Nationalism takes hold in more traditional, and usually more religious societies. Indeed nationalism seems to complement religious feeling, especially fundamentalism” (Fevre, 2000, 151). Without its political setting and cultural context, nationalism becomes just a phantom of imagination.

**My Country, Right or Wrong**

Orwell defined patriotism as a devotion to a particular place or a way of life, which we believe to be the best in the world but which we do not want to impose on anybody. In his view, patriotism is defensive by nature, both militarily and culturally. No decent patriot talks about his or her country or publicly celebrates its history and culture, unless that country is attacked or insulted.

Nationalism, on the contrary, is inseparable from the desire for power. Whereas patriots are attached to a particular place, its culture, dialect, and landscape, nationalists have no more abiding purpose than to secure more power and prestige for the nation or any other group or unit in which they have chosen to sink their individuality (see Orwell, 1970, 155–56).

Neither are things clear with patriotism. If the liberal facet of nationalism implies the critical questioning of society and culture, patriotism, in most cases, is an attachment to, and identification with, a country, its territory, history, landscape, language, and symbols of
power. This attachment and identification can be devoid of any critical approach. The principle, “my country, right or wrong,” may have always been the quintessence of patriotism. Whereas nationalists would criticize sharply any deviation from what they assume as the moral substance of the object of their devotion or commitment, patriots would insist that no fact or event could prevent them from keeping fidelity to their country.

As Aleksandras Shtromas, a Lithuanian émigré political scientist who foresaw the collapse of the Soviet Union, convincingly argued, ardent patriots of Russia were able to close one eye on the Soviet Union’s criminal policies for expanding Russia’s territory and for advancing its interests (see Shtromas, 1994, 183–225). Moreover, they justified Stalin’s crimes precisely for the same reason. Imperial patriots had gone so far as to condemn as traitors those dissidents or former KGB officers who sided with the Soviet Union’s ideological enemies, that is, the United States, Great Britain, and NATO.

Things were absolutely different with nationalists who, according to Shtromas, drew a sharp dividing line between Russia and the Soviet Union. Not only liberal-democratic dissidents like the generous and noble-spirited Andrei Sakharov or the fearless humanist Sergei Kovalyov, but also fiercely nationalistic Aleksandr Solzhenistsyn explicitly regarded the Soviet Union as a criminal state and the Soviet regime as a crime against Russia and humanity.

The dramatic encounter between nationalism and patriotism can be understood only by those who are able to empathize with those who were bound to choose between the Soviet Union as their state and the West regarded by the Soviet propaganda as the embodiment of evil. When you are bound to choose between a rogue state, which claims the exclusive rights of your only motherland, and the supposed enemy of your state, which defends the right cause and protects human rights, it is no longer a theoretical and hypothetical choice. Instead, it is an existential move that leads you to cross the point of no return.

This raises another interesting question: Was Soviet identity compatible with Russian identity? Much energy was spent over the past years arguing about the Soviet Union and its legacy in the academic, intellectual and cultural life of the former republics of the USSR. If we approach Soviet culture as a project and as a historical phenomenon from the perspective of our current situation and experience in the world, then we are in a position to grasp our cultural gains and losses, benefits and misfortunes over the past five decades.

It is tempting to describe Soviet culture to have been merely a political phantom that spoke in the name of culture or an ideological
ghost that served the establishment as a tool of sovietization. If we distinguish between genuine and forced internationalism, then we have to ask whether Soviet culture was just an ideological mask of Russian culture or a serious attempt to create something like a rival civilization, using the Russian language as a lingua franca of Eastern Europe, and Russian culture as a great modern alternative to the West.

Was Soviet culture based on the grandeur and charms of an imperial culture that became a unifying force and a gravitational field in terms of arts, culture, and intellectual life? Every empire has its gravitational field due to a rich and cosmopolitan culture, the latter being part of imperialism. If this was the case with British, Spanish, and French empires, why should things have been different in Tsarist Russia and the Soviet Union?

Much ink has been spilled arguing over the nature of the Soviet empire and whether it was an heir to Tsarist Russia or its irreconcilable foe and destroyer. Yet the fact remains that the USSR inherited and used the immensely rich classics and modern culture of Russia as the beautiful face of the empire, as the symbolic center of its cultural policies and networks and as the gravitational field to attract and educate the elites of non-Russian-speaking republics.

Yet a deep gulf exists between socialist realism in literature under Stalin and people of the 1960s (shestidesiatniki) under Nikita Khrushchev and his policy of the thaw. It is a long way to go from ideological and political travesties of the 1950s to such great poets and writers of the 1960s as, for instance, Bulat Okudzhawa, Yevgeny Yevtushenko, Andrei Voznesensky, Vasily Aksionov, and Robert Rozhdestvensky.

Or it suffices to recall such great figures in Russian or Soviet cinematography as Grigory Kozintsev who made superb Shakespearean productions, such as Hamlet (1964) and King Lear (1970), working with Lithuanian, Latvian, and Estonian actors or appointing his crew from many Soviet republics. Kozintsev appears to have been a perfect example of a great culture permeated with genuine internationalism. It is through these high points in literature, cinematography, theater, and academic music that we can raise the issue of the legacy of Soviet culture, trying to determine its role and place in the processes of political emancipation and relative liberalization of the regime. Was Soviet culture able to become in reality an alternative to the role that was ascribed to it by the regime? Was a Soviet patriot any better and morally superior to a Russian nationalist? Or was everything the other way around?
Soviet culture seems to have revolved around the ambition of a nation of workers to create a new individual and an alternative civilization to the West. This endeavor failed, but left many unanswered questions in its wake. What was Soviet culture? Was it the same Russian culture, only ideologized to the extreme and transformed into a totalitarian project, or was it a completely new type of culture, erasing both history and traditions, and incompatible with anything that had existed before it? Perhaps it was simply an imperial culture seasoned with added radicalism due to Russia’s path to modernization and totalitarian order, or was it a new destructive neologism, eliminating first of all Russia and then all the other nations and cultures that had fallen to its sphere of influence?

There is no one clear answer to these questions. If Soviet culture was indeed completely incompatible with the traditions of Russian and European culture, the question arises, why did the Soviets then still show no tolerance for the truly revolutionary proletarian-cultural movement, which, had it only been allowed to gain momentum, would have simply wiped out all of the literature of the Russian golden and silver ages, not to mention the classics and canon of the West.

Something similar to the absolute triumph of proletarian-cultural logic occurred during the Chinese Cultural Revolution, when the old Confucian Chinese civilization and its cultural traditions were wiped away, like paint from a canvas, all in the name of revolutionary modernization. Later, the same Confucian cultural logic that had been pushed out the back door by the Communists, came back in through the window and legitimized the Communist Party as the new managerial class, but that is another story.

Vladimir Lenin’s and Anatoly Lunacharsky’s tirades about the Soviet person, absorbing the very best that humanity has created and adding to this cultural golden fund Soviet ideals of incomparable value testifies to the compromise that this, seemingly lethal, heroism and death-worshipping culture has made, in respect to the classics and the Western canon. It suffices to recall Lenin’s open admiration for Leo Tolstoy’s novels, Ludwig van Beethoven’s sonatas, and the comparison of Tolstoy with a rock and the belief that there is nothing of greater beauty than Beethoven’s *Appassionata*.

If we compare these classical tastes and orientation toward the ideas of artists and philosopher-modernists of Western Europe, such as Theodor W. Adorno’s evaluation of Beethoven’s music as the aestheticization of the bourgeois world, and the reconciliation of that world with, to use Adorno’s term, his affirmation, then Lenin in reality appears not as the great leader of the October Revolution and creator of the
workers’ nation, but rather as a small-league bourgeoisie, a stranger to real radicalism, change on a worldwide scale, and the spirit of creative experimentation.

In other words, this attempt by Lenin and other more highly educated Bolsheviks to reconcile totalitarianism and the cultural canon was most likely what the Nazis called cultural Bolshevism (*Kulturbolschewismus*), that is, the lack of radicalism and heroism when renouncing vital values and worshipping brute force. While this phenomenon was not only evidence of the parasitic effect of Soviet totalitarianism at the cost of European traditions, and its inability to provide any suitable antithesis, at the same time, it did save the Hermitage and other art galleries and libraries from physical destruction.

Stalin, with his aesthetic tastes and evaluation of artworks, in no way reminds us of a leftist modernist (there were also right-leaning modernists—let us not forget the Italian Fascist artists). During the World War II, he was forced to rely on Sergei Eisenstein’s film *Alexander Nevsky* to mobilize feelings of Russian patriotism, not to mention Eisenstein’s other film *Ivan the Terrible*, in which Stalin undoubtedly recognized himself, symbolically incorporated into the tradition of Russian political might and the state’s history.

After Lenin’s open renouncement of Tsarist Russia’s imperial patriotism, such sentiments expressed by Stalin appear at the very least strange and can be evaluated as a covert return to traditions about the might of the old regime. This can also be likened to Stalin’s predilection for nightly listenings to the arias of famous Ukrainian tenor Ivan Kozlovsky and other well-known opera singers of the time.

So what was Soviet culture after all, which was meant to create the new Soviet person? A feeling for history and reality must first be lost to determinedly state it was the sister of authentic modernism, even less so, avant-garde. Wonderful Russian modernism, which had no equal at the time in Europe, apart from French and Viennese modernism, was literally murdered by the Bolsheviks. The emigration of Wassily (Vasily) Kandinsky, Kazimir Malevich, Marc Chagall, and Mark Rothko, and their transformation into Western artists not only had the effect of saving their artworks (perhaps also their lives) but also shows what Russia may have become in a modern cultural context had it not been subjected to a social and political catastrophe.

Soviet culture was a strange amalgam of propaganda, revolutionary rhetoric, socialist realism, the remains of classical and modern Russian culture, allegorical art and writing between the lines, that is, Aesopian language, in which, as described by Milan Kundera, political and
ideological kitsch coexisted alongside talented artists and grandiose cultural expression.

If the strangest feature of Soviet culture had to be identified, I would undoubtedly have to mention the following parallel yet non-converging realities: Alexander Dovzhenko’s Soviet propaganda kitsch film-studio productions and mass culture at one pole, and geniuses, such as Andrei Tarkovsky or Sergei Parajanov, at the other; Mikhail Shatrov’s hopeless revolutionary plays about Lenin at one end of the spectrum, and at the other, Georgian theater director Robert Sturua, who innovatively brought Shakespeare’s tragedies to the stage, and who on the occasion of its Moscow premiere, had to listen to a fraught Shatrov defend his own authored play. The existence of these parallel realities, allegedly representing the same Soviet culture, is in fact its greatest paradox.

A factured and continually reasserting identity, always producing something different than what existed before, was typical among many participants in the Soviet project—at one stage, the continuity of great Russian culture and traditions was highlighted, concurrent with the advance of the new, that is, Soviet, whose cultural character was incompatible with the old monarchial Russian life, the oppression of other nations, and so on. Indeed, it remains unclear, what held Soviet culture, if it ever existed, together. Was it the forcible and ideological “alliance of nations,” or expressions of the sometimes authentic multinational Soviet Empire’s internationalism?

When Kozintsev created his immortal film versions of Shakespeare’s tragedies, he consciously invited actors from the Baltic countries, allowing them to speak Russian with an accent without dubbing voiceovers. To add, both films, *Hamlet* and *King Lear*, were filmed by the great Lithuanian cinematographer Jonas Gricius. Are all these mere coincidences? Perhaps the Russian master simply needed Western characters? Or maybe no. Instead it may have been his conscious desire to raise the status of his colleagues from other nations to take on the roles about which the cultural representatives of his own nation could only dream of.

Or is it more the becoming of the Baltic nations as the Other in the consciousness and imagination of Russians? Baltic country actors appeared as Westerners but were the same as the rest. In fact, sometimes there was no love lost for the greater fatherland (even more specifically, they were lost between a state of *odi et amo* and tortured by a love-hate ambivalence), but all the same, they were not strangers. Perhaps this is the root of the painful question directed toward Lithuanians, Latvians, and Estonians, often asked by simple Russians: Why
do you dislike us so? More so, perhaps this is the origin of the most chauvinistic of today’s Russian political groupings’ hate for the small Baltic countries, founded on the belief that they betrayed the great nation’s geopolitical interests and rejected its historical friendship?

Of course, the memorable role of the Lithuanian film actor Donatas Banionis in Andrei Tarkovsky’s *Solaris*, as well as the impressive ensemble of Baltic cinema masters in Kozintsev’s films, reach the greatest heights of Russian culture and are not a typical case of Soviet culture. In Soviet films meant for mass consumption, actors from Lithuania and the other two Baltic countries were more often assigned to take on the roles of Nazi Germany’s officers, or American CIA agents (in other words, historical and ideological enemies).

It is no wonder that the recent Estonian documentary film *The Fritzes and the Blondes* reveals an interesting phenomenon—the continual assignment of Nazi roles to Lithuanian, Latvian, and Estonian actors eventually allowed the regime to project the image of the Baltic countries as enemies and fascists. This provocative Estonian film has already received a strong reaction in Estonia but has undoubtedly raised a problem worthy of analysis in postcolonial studies.

So, Soviet culture has a mix of everything—the grandeur and universalism of Russian culture not extinguished during Soviet times, authentic internationalism (which appears to have vanished from contemporary Russian culture), as well as combative, yet fruitless propaganda, artworks of little value, caricatures of high art, and a deformed black-and-white social optical image of the world. One thing raises no doubts—this culture did not produce anything close to a new person. Just as it never became an effective alternative to the West.

Soviet modernization (just like the no more or no less terrible and brutal Chinese modernization) created modernity without freedom, or, paraphrasing the catch-cry of the 1960’s generation after Nikita Khrushchev’s thaw policy, modernity without a human face. George Orwell’s prophecy had come true, that all totalitarian revolutions are destined to become the longest road leading from one form of oppression and exploitation to the next. Or a transformation from one form of capitalism to another that is even more savage.

Yet the most beautiful aspect of Soviet culture, and probably the only beautiful and truly authentic thing in and about it, was the everyday cares, objects, nostalgia, and memories that survived and were fiercely defended in the films, plays and books from Russia and other nations, just as Winston Smith found in Orwell’s *1984*. Such Soviet film directors as Eldar Riazanov, Georgi Daneliya, or Mark Zakharov, and their warm, humanistic films were nothing else than evidence of
the longing for modernity with a human face. Most likely, the same could be said about the great moments of Lithuanian culture from the Soviet period.

Whether Shtromas is right or wrong by making a highly provocative move and deliberately subverting the rules of the game, that is, by regarding nationalism as a good thing, and patriotism as a bad thing, remains to be further discussed. In any case, it is difficult to describe this provocation otherwise than as the best example of how patriotism becomes nationalism liked and nationalism patriotism disliked, or the other way around.

Interestingly, G. K. Chesterton made fun of the principle “my country, right or wrong” perceived as sufficient proof of one’s loyalty and attachment. He reacted to this pearl of wisdom in the following way: “‘My country, right or wrong’ is a thing that no patriot would think of saying … It is like saying ‘My mother, drunk or sober.’”

In 1872, the general and senator Carl Schurtz, who was a German-born patriot and civil war hero of the United States, rephrased the words “my country, right or wrong” in a rather plausible way. Having been told by somebody that this is “my country, right or wrong,” Schurtz replied that he can repeat these words about his country, the great American Republic. And he added: My country, right or wrong; if right, to be kept right; and if wrong, to be set right.

Any form of government or political regime, in the perception of patriots, is an inalienable part of their country and as such has to be supported. Loyalty to government is as necessary as opposition to those who too critically judge it or those who do not wish it well, whether from within or from without. The dividing line between small-scale, timid, and apologetic patriotism, and imperial attachment to, and identification with, the territory as a symbol of the crown or of majestic history, that is, Landespatriotismus, is not as sharp as Orwell imagined it. Both forms of patriotism rest on a vague territorial sentiment and a loosely bound idea of superiority of one country over the rest of the world. Both reject a critical perspective in viewing their country, which is perceived as an object of pride and of defense against those wishing it ill rather than as an embodiment of a link between moral imagination and social reality.

Imperial patriotism has a strong inclination toward a moral monopoly to control and define our sense of roots and our attachment to the place of our memory and primary self-identification. To append a pejorative connotation to the term, which signifies the same that you and your adversaries practice, and to project that connotation onto your adversary, is also an aspect of power. To name means to define
and to define means to possess. Stable names solidly attached to the objects of reality allow us to identify and exercise our own or someone else’s power. The rest of the world has to become us, an extension of our sociopolitical body, and a continuation of our forms of life.

Zygmunt Bauman, even though he admits that the differences between patriotism and nationalism tend in most cases to be rhetorical, offers a penetrating insight into their real, not to say ontological, difference. Whereas patriotism is related to the discourse of “becoming,” nationalism is more about “being.” Patriotism commits itself to the modern creed of the “unfinishidness” and “reformability” of human beings, thus keeping the call to close ranks along with the standing invitation to join the nation, no matter whether real or just imagined and declared. Nationalism, according to Bauman, stands much closer to the Calvinist version of salvation or St. Augustine’s idea of free will: “It puts little trust in choice—you are either ‘one of us’ or you are not, and in either case you can do little, perhaps nothing at all, to change it. In the nationalist narrative, ‘belonging’ is a fate, not a chosen destiny or a life project” (Bauman, 2008, 175).

However, Bauman reaches beyond rhetoric and goes to the root of the inclusion-exclusion issue pivotal both in patriotism and nationalism. Of the inclusion-exclusion dichotomy in social life, Bauman writes,

This difference between patriotism and nationalism tends to reach beyond mere rhetoric into the realm of political practice. Following Claude Lévi-Strauss’s terminology, we may say that the first formula is more likely to inspire “anthropophagic” strategies (“eating up” the strangers so that they are assimilated by the body of the eater and become identical with its other cells, having lost their own distinctiveness), while the second associates more often than not with the “anthropoemic” strategy of “vomiting” and “spitting out” those “unfit to be us,” either isolating them by incarcerating them inside the visible walls of the ghettos or the invisible (though no less tangible for this reason) walls of cultural prohibitions, or by rounding them up, deporting them or forcing them to run away, as in the practice currently given the name of ethnic cleansing. (ibid., 175–76)

Yet when it comes to political rhetoric devoid of any philosophical reflection and critical questioning of oneself, everything ends up in a black-and-white optics of reality. We are patriots, but they are miserable nationalists. Within this identity paradigm, the big and powerful nations appear as movingly patriotic, whereas the small ones remain fiercely nationalistic. At this point, a patriot relates to a nationalist
much in the same way as a hero relates to a suicidal and homicidal fanatic. It all depends on what side you are on, and who defines whom. The question is who has enough power and prestige to create plausible dichotomies and polarities. When we and our conationals or fellow citizens listening to our national anthem feel the lump in the throat, we find ourselves moved and united by our national spirit and collective memory; yet when we observe this happening to our adversaries or foes, we use harsh words to express our disdain for chauvinistic hysteria of a backward people obsessed with their nationalism.

However astonishing it may sound, George Orwell applied the ethics of liberal nationalism to his social and cultural critique without being aware of this. In terms of far-reaching insight into modern sensitivity and its relationship with social reality, Orwell achieved incomparably more than he would have achieved writing in an easily predictable manner as just a fair-minded patriot of England, who passionately opposed jingoism and imperial patriotism. The point is that he found himself at odds with the banal and reactionary essence of jingoism because of his liberal nationalism. I realize that I am going against the current here. The idea that Orwell was a liberal nationalist may be perceived as a heresy, as a characteristically East-Central European obsession with the recent past of East-Central Europe, or else as an imposition of its realities on the rest of the world.

Liberal nationalism, as a moral and political paradigm, has little, if anything, to do with British intellectual and political culture. Only with difficulty could we imagine a more inhospitable and insensitive theoretical setting for the nationalist moral culture than Anglo-American philosophy permeated by nominalism and by mistrust for what it takes as continental idiosyncrasies and wild political theories. This sort of epistemology and social philosophy regards nationalism as one more nebulous concept of notorious holism, that is, of taking a social whole rather than a separate individual as basic unit for social analysis. Holism prizes what it takes as social facts and phenomena, including collective sentiment and memory. For nominalism, which is just another term for methodological individualism, individuals, instead of a social whole made up by the relations between those individuals, constitute an identifiable and trustworthy social reality.

True, the former imperial entities, such as Great Britain, France, Sweden, or Russia, are considerably more leaning to Landespatriotismus, patronizing politics, and to what they perceive as their civilizing mission than to that powerful ethical dimension of genuine internationalism, which is at the core of liberal nationalism. Hence, a great deal of moral provincialism and insensitivity to small countries
and their cultures is inherent in politics of the former empires. We have good reason to believe that liberal nationalism, which is by no means irreconcilable with skeptical liberalism, is likely to have originated from the specifically East-Central European political realities and moral sensibilities.

Yet Orwell’s political and moral stance may best be described as a liberal nationalism, which made him so remarkably close and emphatically sensitive to the tragedies of Central and Eastern Europe. The idea that Orwell’s moral stance was much closer to liberal nationalism than to abstract, ideological, and doctrinal socialism sheds new light on his overall hostility to doctrinaire intellectuals, ideological true believers, and fanatics of all shades. Here and nowhere else lies the secret of Orwell’s nearly magical appeal to East-Central European intellectual and moral sensibilities. Noteworthy is that liberal nationalists tend to be the harshest critics of the sinister mystique, barbaric vocabulary, and ferocious politics of blood-and-soil nationalism. Recall such great Central and East European critics of illiberal nationalism as Czeslaw Milosz, Adam Michnik, Kundera, Václav Havel, or Tomas Venclova (see Donskis, 2002). We do not have to call ourselves a nationalist to be one.

**Disputing Loyalties, Dislocation of Identity, and Transferred Nationalism**

Orwell did touch on the nerve of what we could call a dramatic encounter of disputing loyalties and conflicting values. He described with the stroke of genius what we could take as intrinsic conflicts that occur within the troubled moral imagination. For Orwell, “nationalism” was a code word for a more disturbing and complex phenomenon. Whatever the term he employed, Orwell gave us an invaluable clue to the origin of modern ideological and political fanaticism as a form of hatred. Although mass movements and their interchangeability, doctrinal and mass-oriented politics, and exclusive ideologies may be more accurate terms to describe the target of Orwell’s devastating critique, his concept of transferred and transposed nationalism provides a valuable perspective to view modern fanaticism.

It sheds new light on the modern moral imagination as the battleground of conflicting sets of concepts, values, ideas, stances, and objects of attachment. He stresses the modern uncertainties and ambiguities as a source of fanaticism. The implication is that transferred nationalism results from uncertainty about our primary identity and object of attachment.
We do need an identity and an object of loyalty or attachment. If we are deprived of them, or if we are not at peace with what others passionately identify, we are inexorably doomed to forge their substitutes. In so doing, we are at risk of dangerously improvising or else fabricating an identity, which has no reference point in this-worldly reality and which extends an invitation to the realm of the troubled imagination.

If we are not rooted in this-worldly reality in the sense of being an autonomous individual and of having a solid, resilient, and immutable identity, we will search for a substitute to fill the gap somehow. If we happen to have no attachment to our country, or if we are little appreciated in our culture, a dislocation of our human attachment and loyalty will inevitably take place. The paradox of nationalism, as a thought-and-action system capable of sustaining the modern intellectual and well-grounded moral sensibilities, occurs because its excess and absence can both end up in disaster.

Whereas excess of nationalism leads to moral provincialism and total insensitivity to those who do not belong to us, absence of nationalism results in disconnectedness from all recognizable, down-to-earth idioms of human loyalty and attachment. Nationalism, if it operates in a liberal-democratic setting, does protect us from ideological and political fanaticism, and myriad travesties of human attachment, loyalty, collective memory, and collective sentiment. Our attachment to our culture, language, and landscape is among fundamental human needs. If we lose the primary object of our love and attachment, or if we are deprived of it, we will transfer our loyalty. We will find a new object of attachment elsewhere. It can be another country to which we will attach an alternative, whether real or imaginary, a revolutionary political program, a dissenting religion, a rival civilization, or an opposing value-and-idea system.

No wonder that transferred nationalism is possible because of the instability and intensity of the nationalist’s loyalties. The only thing that remains constant in the nationalists, according to Orwell, is their state of mind. The object of their feelings is changeable and may be imaginary. This sort of ideological fervor, nationalism, as Orwell would have it, can be transposed or reversed.

Thus, former admirers of the United States can turn into the greatest skeptics and critics of that country, reserving their love and admiration for its newly found adversary, if not a rival civilization, namely, Russia. This happened to H. G. Wells, who moved from Americophilia to Americophobia, coupled with Russophilia. That several members of the Nazi Party were recruited from the German Communist Party
when the Nazis came to power, and that Communists were regarded by the Nazis as a far lesser evil than Social Democrats is a fact.

This was subtly interpreted by Eric Hoffer, who also placed much emphasis on what he termed the “interchangeability of mass movements” (see Hoffer, 1963, 17–21). This is much the same phenomenon that Orwell described as transferred nationalism. In his masterpiece *The True Believer*, Hoffer showed convincingly how easily and naturally some Russian and East/Central European Jews moved from Communism to Zionism, and the other way around, or how complementary were Communism and National Socialism (see idem). A nearly perfect example of how it was possible to hold, in the epoch of manifesto ideologies and mass movements, two, one would think, mutually exclusive identities and sets of Weltanschauung, was provided by Isaiah Berlin who analyzed the case of Moses Hess, a Marxist and Zionist at one and the same time (see Berlin, 2001, 213–51.).

If people deny their primary linguistic and cultural identity, they have to forge a new one. If they feel that they had lost or had not yet found their homeland, they will search for one somewhere else. If they abandon an earthly homeland as such, they are condemned to fabricate an ideology as a substitute for one. A most telling hint that Marx drops concerns the proletarians, who have no homeland by definition. Therefore, the proletarians’ guiding principle and salvation come from the otherworldly reality, since they represent the home-free class with no attachment to bourgeois this-worldly values, rituals, and traditions.

This ontological placelessness, cultural homelessness, and historical rootlessness logically lead to Marx’s assertion that the proletarians have nothing to lose in this world. Instead, they have Communism as their real homeland. This is a modern travesty of early Christianity with its idea of the *populus christianus*, the people in Christ, or a spiritual ensemble of human individuals who become so insofar as they meet in Christ. Yet this is exactly what happens to people within whose minds and souls a dislocation of identity, attachment, and loyalty has taken place. An ideology may become a spiritual Motherland for those who have been deprived of safe attachment to recognizable this-worldly idioms of human connection. An exclusive political ideology or a radical ideological movement may come as a replacement of the lost sense of secure, this-worldly existence in a community of collective memory, shared sentiment, and symbolic participation.

However, we must not all be classified like flies, bees, or ants. We must not all be associated with, and attached to, a once-and-for-all defined culture and community. Modernity denies neither individual
identity nor collective identity. A substantial difference between premodern and modern conditions is that identity transforms itself from a matter of ascription into achievement and free choice. Modernity attempts to free us from our inherited identity, one of the central and greatest, although unfulfilled, promises of the modern era. As Bauman notes, “The modern project promised to free the individual from inherited identity. Yet it did not take a stand against identity as such, against having identity, against having a solid, resilient and immutable identity. It only transformed the identity from a matter of ascription into one of achievement, thus making it an individual task and the individual’s responsibility” (Bauman, 1996, 62).

The modern individual can work out multiple, open-ended, and communicating identities. We can participate in several cultures or trajectories of consciousness, conceiving of them as complementary with regard to one another, and critically questioning our primary object of loyalty, attachment, and culture. This helps understand what has been suppressed in our culture, though it may be more developed in other cultures.

A presupposition of human incompleteness and of the dialogue-based nature of human awareness and self-comprehension, the principle of the polylogue of identities and cultures, is the most valuable achievement of the modern condition. Kavolis stressed the crucial role of such a phenomenon as postmodern nationalism, which “would allow for and recognize the human quality of openness and the cultural characteristic of translucence,” and which could best be described as “a Milosz-like commitment to one’s own nation permeated with a responsiveness to others, a sense of multiple, communicating identities” (Kavolis, 1991, 136). Such a variety of inclusive and pluralist nationalism, whether we call it liberal or postmodern, is not a fiction.

This sort of nationalism as an identity-building or identity-upholding strategy rests on the recognition of the fact of modern life that multiple and communicating identities do exist and that their reconciliation and interplay enable the existence of such dialogue-based and multidimensional modes of self-perception and self-comprehension as being an East-Central European or just a European. Without such a mode of self-comprehension, we would fail to understand key modern moral and political sensibilities.

For instance, Aleksandras Shtromas, an ardent patriot of Lithuania, regarded himself both as a Jew and a Lithuanian. In addition, he was a man of Russian sensitivity who felt much at home in Russian culture. It suffices to mention that Shtromas was a native speaker of Lithuanian and Russian, and spoke to his father in Lithuanian and
to his mother in Russian. Leonid Pinsky, a noted Russian scholar of Renaissance literature and Shakespeare, and Grigory Pomerantz, an eminent Russian philosopher and scholar of Oriental cultures, made a great impact on Shtromas. As a Soviet dissident active in Lithuania and Russia, Shtromas knew in person and cooperated with such great Soviet dissidents as Andrei Sakharov, Elena Bonner, Andrei Sinyavsky, Yuli Daniel, and Vladimir Bukovsky. Alexander Galich and Alexander Ginzburg were his close friends. Yet the attachment to Lithuania and Russia did not prevent Shtromas from becoming an enthusiast of Great Britain and the United States where he spent much of his time as an émigré scholar.

Or recall Vasily Sesemann, a towering figure in Lithuanian academic philosophy. Born in Finland, the son of a Swedish-speaking Finnish father and of a Russian-speaking German mother, he was brought up in Russia and then spent much time in Germany until he moved to Lithuania in the 1920s, accepting the full professorship in philosophy from Vytautas Magnus University in Kaunas, Lithuania. Exiled to Siberia in 1945, Sesemann survived the Soviet camp and returned to occupied Lithuania where he continued his research and lecturing at Vilnius University. Influenced by German neo-Kantians of the Marburg School and phenomenology, Sesemann stood close to the Russian Formalists and may have laid the theoretical foundations for semiotics (see Tarasti, 2006; Donskis, 2007). Fluent in Lithuanian, Russian, German, and Swedish, Vasily Sesemann (Wilhelm Sesemann in Finland and Vosylius Sezemanas in Lithuania) may well be described as a Finnish, Russian, German, and Lithuanian philosopher, and he, perhaps, merits the title of a great Baltic philosopher more than anybody else.

Throughout the twentieth century, Lithuania’s self-image as the Athens of the North has peacefully coexisted with a moderate messianic construct, casting this small nation as an important bridge between East and West (the former often reduced to Slavic civilization or Russia). The concept of a synthesis of civilizations—East and West—was elaborated and promoted by the Lithuanian philosopher Stasys Salkauskis, particularly in *Sur les confins de deux mondes* (On the Boundary of Two Worlds, 1919), the book on Lithuania Salkauskis wrote in French while he was living in Switzerland. An examination of several interwar Lithuanian philosophical texts reveals just how strongly Lithuanian philosophy was affected by nineteenth- and twentieth-century Russian philosophy. Two key Lithuanian intellectuals—Stasys Salkauskis and Vincas Mykolaitis-Putinas—wrote their doctoral dissertations at the University of Fribourg in Switzerland.
troubled identity and the modern world

(both written in French), focusing on the prominent Russian religious philosopher Vladimir Soloviev.

Salkauskis studied Soloviev’s philosophy of religion, while Putinas analyzed the Russian thinker’s aesthetics. Salkauskis’s dissertation was titled *L’âme du monde dans la philosophie de Vl. Soloviev* (*Love of the World in the Philosophy of Vladimir Soloviev*, 1920), and Putinas’s was titled *L’Esthétique de Vladimir Soloviev* (*Vladimir Soloviev’s Aesthetics*, 1923). During that period, in addition to Soloviev, other Russian writers and thinkers—Nikolai Berdyaev, Fyodor Dostoevsky, Konstantin Leontyev, the Russian nihilists, among others, influenced many Lithuanian academics and public intellectuals. In addition to other influences of Russian culture on Lithuania, these thinkers’ ideas can, in part, be seen as a principal source of Lithuanian messianism. Roughly speaking, Salkauskis’s vision of Lithuania as a bridge between the civilizations of East and West is nothing but another term for the specifically Russian notion of Eurasia, though this concept is usually reserved exclusively for Russia and its historic mission. A devout reader and follower of Solovyov, Salkauskis’s concept of a synthesis of civilizations is merely a Lithuanian variation on a classic theme in nineteenth- and twentieth-century Russian social philosophy.

“Eurasianism,” both as a philosophical tendency and model of cultural or civilizational identity, was a central concept in Lev Karsavin’s work and writing—he spent several decades lecturing in Lithuania and fundamentally influenced the development of Lithuanian philosophy of culture and cultural history. In 1928, he was offered a professorship at Vytautas Magnus University in Kaunas, where he had arrived from Paris. An eminent Russian religious thinker and an erudite cultural historian, Karsavin soon became a fluent speaker of Lithuanian and established his reputation as one of the most brilliant lecturers at Vytautas Magnus University. His five-volume magnum opus, *Europos kulturos istorija* (*The Cultural History of Europe, 1931–1937*), written in Lithuanian and published in interwar Lithuania, is a work of European significance and has yet to be surpassed among Lithuanian contributions of the sort. When the Soviet Union repeatedly occupied Lithuania after World War II, Karsavin was exiled to the Komi ASSR, where he died in 1952. A man with several planes of identity and of multidimensional spiritual and moral existence, Karsavin converted to Roman Catholicism.

At the same time, Lithuania would be unthinkable without its magnificent Jewish legacy. Before the World War II, Lithuania was famous for its very large Jewish community. About 240,000 Jews lived in Lithuania; only 20,000 survived the Holocaust. The Lithuanian
capital, Vilnius—occupied by Poland from 1920 to 1939—was known around the world as the Jerusalem of the North, and many internationally eminent Jews lived in or were from Lithuania. Needless to say, the history of Jewish civilization would be unthinkable without Lithuania’s Jews—the Litvaks.

Suffice it to recall those who inscribed the names of the Litvaks and Lithuania on the cultural map of the twentieth-century world—the philosophers Emmanuel Lévinas and Aron Gurwitsch, the painters Chaïm Soutine (a close friend of Amedeo Modigliani in Paris), Pinkus Krémègne, Michel Kikoïne, Marc Chagall (all these painters were related to Belarus and, in one way or another, to Lithuania—most importantly, all were Litvaks) and Neemija Arbitblatas, the sculptor Jacques Lipchitz, the violinist Jascha Heifetz, and the art critic Bernard Berenson. How to describe Berenson other than as a Lithuanian-born Italian-British-American art critic or Chagall as a Belarusian-born Russian-French (and deeply Jewish) painter?

But then the question remains why and how is Chagall, born in Vitebsk, described as a Belarusian- or Russian-born French painter and why and how is Soutine, born in Smilovichi, characterized as a Lithuanian-born French painter? Both towns, Vitebsk and Smilovichi, throughout the nineteenth century and in the beginning of the twentieth, belonged to that same Vilnius administrative area in Tsarist Russia. More than that, both towns are historically related to what once has been the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. Is not this difficulty to strictly define an artist with several planes of identity a symptom of the absurdity of the “one language, one nation, and one culture” logic of mainstream nationalism? Or how to “categorize” far and away the greatest ethicist of the twentieth century Lévinas other than as a Lithuanian-born French philosopher deeply rooted in Russian and Jewish cultures? Do they all exclusively belong to Litvak or Yiddish legacy? Or should they be identified as Europeans who chose a country and a language of self-fulfillment? Do they tell a story about their culture, or is it the other way around?

We can continue the list of people who do not easily fall into the category in terms of identity or culture. The description “British political theorist and historian of ideas” does not cover an immense territory of Sir Isaiah Berlin’s identity as a Latvian-born and Russian-speaking person with his roots in East-European Jewish life. When we put Isaac Bashevis Singer into the category as a Polish-born American or Jewish writer, we miss the point by putting aside his Chasidic cultural substance and the world of the Yiddish language and literature as a primary source of his selfhood and moral imagination. The same
applies to Martin Buber in relation to who all ready-made labels stop working. True, Buber was an Israeli philosopher, but a significant part of his identity and background came from Austria and Germany. Having said that, we have to add that even the configuration of Austrian, German, Jewish, and Israeli symbolic meanings and cultural references would fail to do justice to Buber’s identity, which was formed by his conscious attempt to bridge Western and Eastern European segments of Jewish identity by choosing Chasidic tales and legacy. How to interpret Buber’s *I and Thou* without taking into account his idea of mapping Jewish religious experience and identity through a close link between the dialogue-based personalism and direct invocations of God that permeate Chasidic tales? Who is a Jew then if not someone who does not allow his or her words to come easily when defining him or herself and saying aloud who she or he is.

At this point, we have to agree with Orwell. To classify human beings as insects and to overgeneralize entire nations as intrinsically good or bad makes no sense. Such pearls of conventional wisdom as describing Spaniards as natural-born aristocrats, Britons as hypocrites, or Germans as treacherous were conceived by Orwell as that same kind of divorce of loyalty and moral judgment, a symptom of modern consciousness, which he described as nationalism.

As we have witnessed, a sinister propensity to equate much-hated modernity exclusively with the “Jews” or with “America,” which is one of the most dangerous follies of the modern troubled imagination, may lead to far more tragic consequences than stereotyping or the spread of exhausted clichés. You might suggest, however, that nothing is innocent in the age of intense collective hatred, that everything begins in political cartoons or literary forgeries and ends in the killing of innocent people.

**Modular Person**

Ernest Gellner’s insights into the modern phenomenon, which he termed “human modularity,” can give us a clue to analyze a powerful antidote to fanaticism. Like modular furniture that consists of parts from which we can gather a set of furniture adding a sofa or a table on our wish, the modular person can belong to several associations or clubs without being open to charge of treason. Gellner put it thus:

> It is the political consequences of modularity which are really important. Modular man can combine into effective associations and institutions, without these being total, many-stranded, underwritten by ritual,
and made stable through being linked to a whole set of relationships, all of these then being tied in with each other and so immobilized. He can combine into specific specific-purpose, \textit{ad hoc}, limited associations, without binding himself by some blood ritual. He can leave an association when he comes to disagree with its policy without being open to the charge of treason. A properly terminated contract is not an act of treachery, and is not seen as such. A tenant who gives due notice and pays the recognized rent, acquires no stigma if he moves to a new tenancy. Yet these highly specific, unsanctified, instrumental, revocable links or bonds are effective! \textit{This} is civil society: the forging of links which are effective even though they are flexible, specific, instrumental. Society is a structure, it is not atomized, helpless and supine, and yet the structure is readily adjustable and responds to rational criteria of improvement. (Gellner, 1995, 41–42)

Civil society and nationalism, as pointed out by Gellner, are the offspring of human modularity. Therefore, the emergence of modular man/woman (who can equally well shape him or herself as an actor of civil society or as an agent of a shared nationalist culture) is the high price that has been paid by the West for the establishment of civil society, the latter being unthinkable without the secularization of consciousness and the emancipation of individual reason and conscience.

It is a high price because the former place of the hero is reserved for the entrepreneur; the nationalist replaces the former religious enthusiast; the current social critic comes to replace the former religious/political dissident. A modern civil society obviously loses ritual, social theater and ballet, ritualized dancing and music. In brief, it loses sound and expression, or sound and fury, as David Hume would have it (see Hume, 1956, 49–50; Hume, 1985, 75–78). Yet it gains flexibility, stability, and compatibility of such things as are being perceived in traditional societies or modern ideocracies as incompatible in principle.

The good thing about modularity is that it diminishes fanaticism and serves as its powerful antidote. The dark side of modularity exists, though. Through modularity, that is, our interchangeable, optional, renewable, negotiable, removable, and circumstance-and-situation-friendly identities, we expose ourselves as the manufacturers of our life and forgers of our relations with other people.

To celebrate our modularity, to renew or change our identity, and then to start complaining about the loss of the sense of authenticity of being or of genuine affection to somebody would be nothing other than a contradiction in terms. We cannot have the Proteus-like existence, loosening a sense of belonging and strengthening an identity game, combined or supplemented with stability, a safe
place in community, and roots. We have to make up our mind and to choose one of these two options, for we cannot have both of them at the same time.

Having these contradictory, irreconcilable, and mutually exclusive dreams brings us close to those who suffer from the impossibility of enjoying global economy combined with local homogenous culture and familiar, unchanging community life. In Dumont’s terms, it would imply something like a complaint about the weakening of the hierarchy of values in modern life, which would come to him as a profound misunderstanding. Once we cross the point of no return and choose modernity and individualism, we cannot have hierarchy as the controlling principle of our civilization.

Therefore, we should not be shocked by the fact that TV and pop music stars play a far more important role in our modern societal life than all European cultural legacies and intellectuals combined. Gellner also warned us that a modular person is a nationalist and that human modularity fosters mass anonymous society (see Gellner, 1996).

Two Europes: Postimperialism and Small Nations

What exactly is meant by postimperialism here? One could call it a strange state of affairs between politics and international relations, when former empires deny their colonial history but maintain their great influence in their former satellite states, which, under the guise of political correctness and good taste, are called friendly nations and traditional allies. Besides, postimperialism cannot be imagined without a paternalistic and protective attitude to smaller or economically and politically weaker countries.

The current European Union vision, as seen from the perspective of the exclusive club of France, Germany, and Great Britain, which also includes countries holding less power and influence (noted for not having de facto a decisive vote at critical moments), is a typical expression of postimperialism or postimperialist syndrome.

There is however another possible future for Europe—a Europe where smaller states and nations would have the last word, when speaking about cultures or the details of community life hundreds of years in the making. That would be a Europe where Danes, the Flemish, Lithuanians, Latvians, Estonians, and Icelanders would play no smaller role than the French, Germans, or British.

When former president of France, Jacques Chirac, accidentally said that the countries of Eastern Europe had missed their chance to keep
quiet, he undoubtedly stripped bare a carefully disguised postimperialist syndrome. It resulted in leaving a huge gulf between the two Europes, irrespective of what titles they are given. Postimperialist syndrome can also exist in countries that have long ago lost the positions they once held in the international arena but still maintain a thinly disguised paternalistic, moralistic, and arrogant attitude to their former colonies or weaker neighbors. The British and French are too obvious to mention here—it suffices to remember the commonly expressed feelings of Swedish politicians toward Finland or the Baltic states.

Interestingly, the imperial sentiments of Swedes, which up until now have not descended into a strange amalgam of Swedish socialism and monarchism, enshroud the veil of Sweden as a “moral superpower”—they often assign themselves the reputation of being the most just and advanced country in the world, allowing Swedes to easily moralize all the other “backward” countries. I shall never forget how, during a seminar in Stockholm, the outwardly respectable moderator, a former diplomat, started talking about the Baltic states as if they were countries whose mentalities and customs were difficult for Swedes to understand because everything was completely different there. The argument was that similar forums would aid in increasing their awareness. In other words, the territory of the Baltic states is *ubi leones*.

After this masterpiece of postimperialist syndrome, a Finnish film director stood up and openly mocked the Swedish moderator, calling his ideas recidivistic, from the perspective of taking a colonialist approach to one’s neighboring countries. This was not an isolated case—in Sweden, as well as Germany, the Baltic states are talked of more often than the United States in the sense that to understand them, one must in the least take a course on Baltic anthropology, which would reveal incomprehensible codes of behavior, feelings, and thinking new to the West.

Postimperialism is a mask or veil of power once held but now lost, of which there are attempts to remind a significantly changed world of the division of roles in the former theater of world politics. Postimperialist syndrome is expressed not only through nostalgia, political rituals, or the hope of maintaining one’s importance but also through intellectual strategies that hope to deflect the origins of today’s most painful problems away from oneself and address them to new political actors. In other words, place one’s own historical mistakes on the shoulders of newcomers.

For example, a typical element of the discourse on postimperialist syndrome is throwing the shadow of doubt onto the appearance of smaller nations on the world political map—deliberately discrediting
the current world order or the logic of emancipation that helped these very same smaller nations disentangle themselves from their respective empires and create modern states.

Nationalism is frequently described in pejorative terms not only by Americans—for example, the adjective “suicidal” was appended to the word by President George Bush—but also by European scholars, though an obvious difference in emphasis and assessment remains between American and European academics. In fact, neither a highly enthusiastic point of view nor the demonization of nationalism can lead to in-depth interpretation and analysis of the origins of this nineteenth- and twentieth-century phenomenon. Instead of attacking or attempting to justify nationalism, we should explore how it influences the social structure and symbolic organization of a given society or even civilization. For, in fact, nationalism has been and continues to be instrumental in (re)shaping modern consciousness and social reality. Such a fundamental change is worthy not of the reduction to which it is so often subjected but of serious analytical attention and theoretical exploration.

Alexander J. Motyl had accurately analyzed the tendency to describe nationalism exclusively in pejorative terms. According to Motyl,

Further complicating the definitional problem is that users of the term often ascribe to it an exclusively pejorative connotation. The adjectives that are frequently appended to the word—such as suicidal, irrational, hyper and emotional—reveal that nationalism is merely a code word for exaggerated national sentiment … Indeed, Conor Cruise O’Brien explicitly defines nationalism as “a conglomerate of emotions. …” (So, too, I add, are love, hate and, alas, virtually everything else!) (Motyl, 1992, 309)

In simple terms, this is a way of frightening the world with the monster of nationalism, at the same time exclaiming remorse that the former world order has fallen apart, where the logics of identity were completely different, and where there was no alleged antagonism between nations. The dramas of the twentieth century are often explained by nationalism or its dangerous intrusion into the system of international relations and world politics. The sentiments of larger nations are presented as authentic patriotism, and the reaction it creates among smaller nations is presented as being suicidal nationalism.

First, an attempt to explain the twentieth century’s social catastrophes without attributing them to the decline of empires, changed power constellations, and the total “modernization” of the world,
but, instead, attributing them to nationalism is in the very least unfair, and perhaps even foolish. The two world wars were not started by nationalism, but by collapsing empires, and the new regimes stepping into their place, which sought to occupy the former power positions and realize the same totalitarian projects, regimes guided by global Communist and racist Nazi ideologies.

Second, empires have collapsed thanks to nationalism. It was due to the disintegration of the Russian Empire that Poland, Finland, and the Baltic states became independent—Finland at that stage was also considered a Baltic state. The British Empire was seriously shaken by the battles for Irish liberation, while the Mahatma Gandhi movement made a no less gentle impact. The last nail in the coffin of the French Empire was the war in Algeria.

This raises the simple question, Where should our sympathies lie? With the nations that have liberated themselves from empires (sometimes these empires were quite liberal, such as the Austro-Hungarian Empire, but an empire nonetheless) or with the fallen empires? Whose side are we on—of imperialism or freedom? The burden of white man or the emancipation of former colonies? Those secretly believing in the postimperialistic factor of a mission that instills a civilized way of life or the legitimacy of new nations of the world?

The belief that great powers stabilize the world, which is why they should not be dismantled, is truly absurd. This logic led to the outbreak of both world wars and is most likely to ignite another, if there is no timely reaction to declarations that the collapse of the Soviet Union was the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the twentieth century. In fact, this statement by Vladimir Putin, former president and present prime minister of Russia, is different to the expression of postimperialist syndrome in the countries of Western Europe—unlike Western politicians, Russia’s president did not even try to disguise his way of speaking and thinking.

What is being discussed is not a political facade, which needs to serve as a reminder of the formerly held, but now lost power, but the restoration of the Soviet Union and former empires’ borders. The world may well be better off if Russia would only apply Western postimperialism, especially the British version that allowed the English, with their trademark political humor and ability to laugh at their former pretences and grandeur, to farewell their imperial past.

When the tragedy of the former Yugoslavia is mentioned, and nationalism is offered as an explanation, it is hard to dismiss the thought that a helplessly superficial perspective of the problem is being taken. The Balkans were a time bomb set on delay immediately
after the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. It is obvious that after World War II this fragmented country was superficially brought together as a federation by Josip Broz Tito, thereby only conserving Pandora’s box, which was bound to open up sooner or later.

Not nationalism but the delayed domino effect of the collapse of empires created massacres in places where the West could have and should have intervened in time but failed to do so. There is no more bloody a period in international politics than the first and last phases of an imperial cycle—it is their formation and collapse starts a long-term killing and destruction effect; yet in their periods of stability, they can undertake their “civilizing mission” in the colonies and maintain a power-balance-based period of relative political stability.

In this respect, are there not uncanny similarities between the massacres in Yugoslavia and Rwanda? In both cases, one group was favored at the cost of the other, which naturally sowed the seeds of their mutual deadly hate: Belgian bureaucrats and administrators chose the Tutsis, not the Hutus, to work in the police force or as minor clerks. In both cases, the passivity of the West and mere waiting to see how it would all end was in itself a crime. And in both cases, the empires finally collapsed and in their former colonies an artificial code of ethnic and political relations was introduced.

After these events, and in light of the increasing aggression in Russian politics, only cynics could state that the nationalism of small and weak nations is the greatest threat to Europe and the world. The real threat is the delayed collapse of old empires and the resulting formation of new hegemonic derivatives. I do not wish to make allusions, but it may well be that the real and most terrible effects of the disintegration of the Soviet Union will only be felt in the possibly not-too-distant future.

Echoing Herder, Kant, and Renan, Aleksandras Shtromas defined nationalism in the following way:

Insofar as a nation tries to establish itself in the world as an entity independent from another nation’s rule and recognisable as a separate and equal partner by other nations and the world at large, that nation’s nationalism is justified in the same way in which is justified the demand of the individual for the recognition and guarantee of his right not only to liberty but to life itself—for a nation is a kind of collective personality which, differently from an individual human being, cannot survive without liberty even in sheer physical terms; it will, in the end, either get assimilated by the nation-state in which it lives . . . or it is going to be otherwise annihilated.
collective personalities are akin to the human rights of individuals, too. In today’s world of nation-states, this translates itself, in the first place, into each nation’s equal right to self-determination and sovereign statehood. Therefore, as long as nationalism is understood as “primarily a political principle which holds that the political and the national unit should be congruent” [this is Ernest Gellner’s definition], as long as it demands for each nation the equality of political condition, it is a healthy nationalism deserving in my view the wholehearted support of every fair-minded person and every free and democratic nation. (my emphasis) (Shtromas, 1994, 201–2)

Here we find ourselves in the world of modernity and ambivalence. Everything depends on the social and political context. Like marriage, nationalism can easily become a tool of oppression or emancipation, traditionalism or reform, subjugation or liberation. The life of a society and of its individual members is created by dipping into a chest of instruments that is not wide or deep. Everyone wears clothing, everyone needs food, everyone thirsts for intimacy and eroticism, and everyone seeks security and recognition. But precisely at this juncture we encounter the inevitable duality of social life: Clothing can mean both the tramp’s rags and a luxurious silk shirt; wealth can secure people’s dignity and increase their freedom, but it can also lead to their debasement; organized and legitimate power is capable of greatly diminishing the level of depravity and violence in a society, but, at the same time, it can cause the death of many innocent people; sex can become an act of brutality, violation, and humiliation, but in other circumstances, it can liberate persons and make them happy. All of this comes about from that selfsame human material, from that same person’s body and its means of self-realization.

Like the search for an identity, nationalism and patriotism come as a promise of self-comprehension and self-fulfillment in the world of ambivalence and ambiguity. Yet if we end up as a conservative nationalist opposed to a liberal patriot, or vice versa, we do not find the way our of this predicament. The split of our faculties of the soul and of our political and moral sensibilities remains as deep as it was before our attempts to make up our mind, choosing one of the modern paths to emancipation and authentic existence.
Evil and fear are Siamese twins. You can’t meet one without meeting the other. Or perhaps they are but two names of one experience—one of the names referring to what you see or what you hear, the other what you feel; one pointing “out there,” to the world, the other to the “in here,” to yourself. What we fear, is evil; what is evil, we fear.

—Zygmunt Bauman, Liquid Fear

Our sense of existence is a plate photosensitive to black light. It is made up of self-hatred and its immediate reparation.


I hate, therefore I am

Hatred is an ambivalent phenomenon. It comes in many faces. Hatred is at its best when it masquerades as love and compassion. As Max Scheler suggested, on the level of human interaction, love and hatred relate human beings to one another (see Scheler, 1973; Donskis, 2003). Slightly modifying St. Augustine’s definition of evil as insufficient good, we could metaphorically describe hatred as love gone astray. It might be suggested that love and hatred, both profoundly problematic from the point of view of tolerance, are interchangeable. For hatred is a kind of love, which, having lost its object and direction, finds itself unable to leave the world in peace. Instead, it starts searching for what is supposed to be a threat to an object of love and devotion, still unable to identify that object.

It was not accidental, then, that George Santayana once defined a fanatic as “a man who redoubles his efforts when he has forgotten his ends” (cited in Coser, 1997, 106). The accumulation and intensity
of hatred are commensurate to our inability to define ourselves, our object of loyalty and love, and also to understand the world around us. We are able to kill our neighbor led by a firm conviction that we cannot leave his or her supposedly wicked soul in the devil’s possession. We can exorcise our fellow human beings’ souls or police their thoughts driven by the same sort of impulse.

Hatred as symbolic or real exclusion results, both in theory and practice, from our failure to categorize something. We hate those whom we fail to place in our explanatory schemes, cultural categories, or political vocabularies. This is to say that hatred springs from our cognitive dissonance, ambivalence, ambiguity, uncertainty, unsafety, insecurity, self-contempt, frustration, and from our failed discursive practices as well. Hatred may relate human individuals to one another insofar as it is directed to a flesh-and-blood human being. However, it ceases doing so as soon as it is transferred to the level of the imagination. Then it starts fighting the imagined monsters and evils.

This is to say that hatred in the world comes from failure of our rationalist culture to explain thoughts, sentiments, attachments, and moral stances different from ours. As Zygmunt Bauman suggests, we employ the term “evil” as soon as we realize that we are unable to explain, articulate, or otherwise to put into the category something that resists our political language and classificatory system. “S/he is evil” or “the man is evil” pops out in a conversation immediately after we understand that no compromise on moral or political grounds is possible between us and our adversary (please let me leave aside for the time being the question of who should initiate or offer that compromise).

In any case, “evil” means that our foe or adversary is malevolently different from us without attempt to do at least a minimal attempt to think, to feel, or to act like us. Therefore, “evil” is what positively refuses to become one of us or to prolong our existence becoming part of our body, language, social and moral order, mentality, clichés, and habits of the heart. “Evil” is something we cannot swallow, digest, and assimilate being unable, at the same time, to spit or throw it out, to recall Claude Lévi-Strauss’s terms signifying two opposed strategies of dealing with strangers, the anthropophagic and anthropoemic ones.

As Bauman points out:

But what is evil? This is an incurably flawed question, even though so stubbornly and untiringly asked: we are doomed to search in vain for an answer from the moment we have asked it. The question “what is evil?”
is unanswerable because what we tend to call “evil” is precisely the kind of wrong which we can neither understand nor even clearly articulate, let alone explain its presence to our full satisfaction. We call that kind of wrong “evil” for the very reason that it is unintelligible, ineffable and inexplicable. “Evil” is what defies and explodes that intelligibility which makes the world liveable … We can tell what “crime” is because we have a code of laws which criminal acts breach. We know what “sin” is because we have a list of commandments whose breach makes the perpetrators sinners. We resort to the idea of “evil” when we cannot point to what rule has been broken or bypassed for the occurrence of the act for which we seek a proper name. (Bauman, 2007b, 54)

This is what hatred of the modern world is all about. The more intense it becomes, the more disconnected from that world its haters become. To be able to hate as passionately and intensely as our troubled imagination suggests, we have to reject the world just as it is. Hatred cannot in principle accept social reality as it is. Instead, it deals with what might be termed the “idea-images” and with the phantoms of the imagination. Hatred is closely related to the troubled identity; nay, hatred itself is a form of the troubled identity.

This is not to say, however, that hatred is always grounded in history and culture. Whatever the symbolic codes and reference points of social groups that hate one another, hatred is usually instigated or artificially created. It simply cannot last long without manipulation and brainwashing. It is assumed that hatred can be successfully generated only in isolation or in what we call “closed societies”—which is true as far as religious and modern secular ideocracies are concerned—but it can flourish in a liberal democracy as well. Several major social philosophers and sociologists of the twentieth century described antimodernist reactions as brought about by the modern condition—by a strong sense of ambivalence, uncertainty, anxiety, and confusion. Such antimodernist reactions as anti-Semitism, racism, and xenophobia can therefore be explained as symptoms of modern uncertainty.

The separation of a name, or any other sort of appellation, from a flesh-and-blood person is already the path leading away from hatred. Hatred begins with the cognitive relationship, with the destruction of the world. People always refuse to get to know or delve deeply into what they hate. At the same time, hatred depersonalizes its object by removing the unique traits that characterize it.

Hatred only begins to dissipate when people hold one another’s gaze or else look in the direction of other objects in the world. A loving person glances quietly at the world, at things, at works of creation,
and at people. Those who hate do not want to see; they are always cocked to start speaking of names and designations but not about individuals.

To begin despising a well-defined individual in a spontaneous manner is quite difficult. In a highly competitive world, this is true up to the point where the person poses no threat or else becomes a problem. If you want to maintain your loathing successfully, you must first depersonalize the intended object of hatred. This can only be accomplished by bringing language into play to replace a living being and an inimitable face with words and labels. We reduce those we hate to a designation, a category, or a grouping that reveals nothing about them. Hatred prefers a rich and encrusted language, as well as a refined terminology.

Hatred tends toward active verbalization because it is only possible where situations involving eye-to-eye or face-to-face contact have been prohibited. When you look people directly in the eye, it is impossible to despise them or discriminate against them. Most commonly, people are objects of hatred when they are the bearers of a name or are members of a sex, a type, or a group but not when they are perceived as unique individuals with distinguishable facial features that allow them not be confused with any other person. This, then, is the metaphysics of the human face. Spontaneously, almost impulsively, the face is respected as a testament to the miracle of the encounter between people. Yet it is also cause for embarrassment in the presence of baseness or atrocity.

Hatred vanishes when real people encounter one another, having cast aside their names and designations. It burrows its way to the place where the battle takes place between recollections, interpretations, narratives, names, labels, and competing memories or sufferings that refute each other radically. People can hate one another, when they are engaged in the acts of speaking, shouting, mourning, and laughing, but they almost never feel hatred when they are looking at one another for extended periods. This is why enemies avoid long gazes.

Gazes pose a danger to hatred, to the resolve necessary in battle, and to feelings of vengeance. A long and silent gaze obliterates intolerance. The only effective manner of prolonging hatred is to isolate physically those who hate from their objects of hatred, which exhausts both sides sooner or later. This organized hatred was well understood, created, and exploited by totalitarian regimes. It has been grasped thoroughly by today’s criminal and hate groups.

Human individuality is annihilated by intolerance and by death. Intolerance is death’s midwife. Both act as levelers of people. And
they both always target that greatest of miracles, which the geniuses of Western European art, from Leonardo da Vinci, Hans Holbein the Younger, Anthony van Dyck, Frans Hals, Johannes Vermeer, and Rembrandt, to Chaïm Soutine and Amedeo Modigliani, have tried to comprehend: The fragile and vulnerable human face and the individuality of the soul. Love alone can restore a human soul that has been wounded or disintegrated. Not only can love restore, but it can confer a new individuality on a person.

Hatred of the despised is useful in and of itself. It allows people to better orient themselves in the world. Hatred divides those in our vicinity into necessary categories and offers signposts indicating how we should treat people and groups. Hatred creates the illusion of continuity and traditions of respect within a group: Despise those whom your ancestors, family, tribe, clan, or nation despised, and you will be naturally loyal to your own tradition while maintaining your identity and sense of history. We find particularly easy to hate those who are trying to topple a world order that is recognizable to some while offering change to others. Uncertainty, unsafety, and insecurity, this unholy trinity of modernity, fuel and instigate hatred.

As Ralph Fevre suggests, the deterioration of amity and the complete absence of emotion are also deeply characteristic of our present consciousness and culture. As Fevre points out,

Less amity does not mean more hate ... We are not talking about anything emotional here, but rather of the complete absence of emotion which leads to the now commonplace absence of generosity, and meanness of spirit, with which we are accustomed to treat each other ... This is not hating, not even disliking, just a refusal to believe in other people, which means that when we do brush up against each other in an uncontrolled situation we can easily fall to casual insults and tokens of aggression which are occasioned by nothing and signify nothing. ... (Fevre, 2000, 77)

Hatred is just another term for uncertainty, fear, and anxiety. What lurks beneath hatred is the want of certainty, a passionate need for it, and the fear that uncertainty will break down the whole structure of our individual and collective identity, self-comprehension, and our understanding of the world around us. We hate those who are certain and conscious of their identity. The hatred of the modern world is inseparable from the hatred of the way in which it undermines the old certainties.

As Erich Fromm notes,
We must remember what has been said about the nature of this doubt: it was not the rational doubt which is rooted in the freedom of thinking and which dares to question established views. It was the irrational doubt which springs from the isolation and powerlessness of an individual whose attitude toward the world is one of anxiety and hatred. This irrational doubt can never be cured by rational answers; it can only disappear if the individual becomes an integral part of a meaningful world. (Fromm, 1994, 77)

Modernity came into being marked by hatred and contempt for what was thought of as the backward and superstitious world. Inevitably, the excesses and challenges of modernity resulted in a retaliatory hatred that the defenders of the old regimes and traditions felt for them. If this vicious circle can end in a kind of modernity with a human face, it is possible only through the polylogue of civilizations. Ultimately, such modernity with a human face can be reached only through tolerance and a moral logic that comes to bridge individuals and societies, instead of the logic of triumph of the new over the old or of “us” over “them.”

The Old Anti-Semitism in the New Europe: The Case of Lithuania

The phenomena of innocence and self-victimization are instrumental in shaping what might be termed the “culture of determinism” and the “culture of poverty.” Victimized consciousness is moved by a belief in malevolent and sinister forces of the universe—allegedly manifesting themselves through secret and elusive human agencies, which come to manipulate and to dominate the world through subversive activities, immediately targeting the single most fragile actor. The principle of evil is permanently ascribed to the big and powerful, while the principle of good is reserved exclusively for the small and vulnerable.

This means that, by implication, I cannot err or sin if I belong to a small, vulnerable, and fragile group; conversely, it means that I can never be on the right side if, by birth and upbringing, I happen to belong to the ranks of the privileged or powerful. My human value and merit are predetermined and can thus easily be judged in terms of my race, gender, nationality, or class.

Such reasoning, which takes all human beings as irreversibly shaped and moved by biological or social forces with no moral or intellectual choice involved, is a powerful element of conspiracy theory. Regrettably,
this kind of modern barbarity, which deprives humanity of the sense of fellowship and tends to replace it with the concepts of natural animosity and everlasting struggle between irreconcilable groups or forces, tends to surface and extend its influence beyond underground consciousness. Far from being qualified as social pathology, it assumes the status of something normal and even progressive.

Conspiracy theory allows no room for critical self-reflexivity and critical self-discovery. At this point, it is a mortal enemy of moral philosophy. Whereas modern political philosophy, properly understood, is an extension of moral philosophy, the point of departure for conspiracy theory is a radical denial of theoretical reflection, critical judgment, and moral accountability. Infinite manipulation and unlimited power are the ultimate ends that motivate evil forces. The world is too naïve, vulnerable, and fragile to unmask the real masters and the sordid manipulations through which they keep that world in the darkness of ignorance, stupidity, and self-deception; this is the message that conspiracy theory conveys to its adherents.

In Moralizing Cultures, Vytautas Kavolis suggests that this phenomenon is deeply rooted in a modern system of moralization, which he terms the “culture of determinism.” Kavolis puts it thus:

A modern amoral culture, in the sense that it tends to eliminate the notion of individual moral responsibility without taking collective responsibility seriously, is the culture of determinism. In this culture it is assumed that individuals are shaped and moved by biological or social forces in all essentials beyond the control, or even the possibility of major choices, of the individuals affected by them. The four major intellectual foci of this culture are the theory that “biology (or racial inheritance) is destiny”; the belief that the human being is and should be nothing but a utility-calculating, pleasure-maximizing machine; the conviction that the individual is, in currently existing societies, only a victim of the “oppressive,” “impoverished,” “devitalizing,” or “traditionally constricted” social conditions of his or her existence (without the ability to become an agent of his fate and assume responsibility for her actions); and the notion that he can be helped out of such conditions solely by the “guidance of experts” who have a “rational social policy” at their disposal, in the determination of which those who are to be helped participate merely as instruments of the experts. (Kavolis, 1993, 48)

Kavolis’s concept of a modern amoral culture sheds new light on why victimized groups or societies relate to ruling elites as patients relate to specialists dispensing diagnosis and treatment. At the same time, it takes us directly to the heart of the matter, by allowing us
to understand how and why a victimized culture manifests itself as the culture of destiny and determinism, as opposed to the culture of freedom and choice.

The concept of amoral culture reveals the links between all kinds of deterministic theories, especially in the social sciences. Kavolis starts by quoting Sigmund Freud’s dictum “biology is destiny” and then goes on to highlight other modes of discourse that speak out in favor of inexorable laws of racial inheritance, history, milieu, societal life, and social organization. A modern amoral culture denying individual rational responsibility and moral choice, or the culture of determinism in Kavolis’s parlance, is a system of moralization, disseminated in the modern moral imagination. It is the outcome of confusion and uncertainty that our epoch is suffering from and of what has been termed by Pitirim A. Sorokin “demoralization.”

The demoralization of Western culture was incisively and insightfully analyzed by Fevre, who noticed the relationship between our obsession with morality in politics and the profound demoralization of Western culture, which reflects our unresolved dilemmas, confusion, and uncertainty. As Fevre notes,

We are used to hearing the strident voices of politicians and religious figures who tell us their views on morality in the hope of winning our votes or our prayers (or donations), but this debate is not joined just by those who have a vested interest in its continuance. At the start of the twenty-first century the debate about values is carried on everywhere—in the newspapers, in the movies, even in the mundane world of daytime TV. This is not just roof that the mass media is fulfilling its time-honoured role of passing on moral lessons to those who need them most, but rather reflects genuine confusion about our morality. Those of us who consume this material are more unsure about where right and wrong might lie than at any previous point in our history. (Fevre, 9)

The culture of determinism is characteristic of antimodernist reactions, including racism, technocracy, and other forms of deterministic consciousness. It stands quite close to what Algis Mickunas and Joseph J. Pilotta analyzed as technocratic liberation walking in the guise of democracy (see Mickunas and Pilotta, 1998, 31–73). It also includes a belief in inexorable historical laws, a phenomenon that Karl R. Popper termed “historicism.” The culture of determinism manifests itself as a principal driving force behind totalitarian regimes. This is to say that totalitarianism without all-pervasive deterministic consciousness would merely be a contradiction in terms. At the same time, the
culture of determinism penetrates all “minor” forms of organized hatred. It appears wherever the quest for enemies is in demand.

The culture of determinism is not only a perfect home for conspiracy theories of all shades; it is also another term for what I call modern barbarity. Indeed, it might be suggested that totalitarianism and the spirit of technology are both the offspring of such barbarity. For instance, Leszek Kolakowski describes totalitarianism and the spirit of technology as forms of modern barbarity (see Kolakowski, 1990, 14–31). The culture of determinism not only informs modern anti-Semitism but also many other manifestations of antimodern sentiments. It has evidently incorporated the kind of medieval, quasi-animistic, and exorcist principles, which readily attributed adultery and even rape to the alleged presence of seductive and demonic powers in women.

Its symbolic (anti-)logic brings to mind the even older accusations of maleficium, which were leveled at the first Christians within the Roman Empire but later reserved by Christians for the Jews. We would deceive ourselves by insisting on maleficium as the voice of the past and as something impossible nowadays: Cases like the Beiliss ritual murder trial (in 1913, Mendel Beiliss, a clerk of Jewish origin, was tried in Kiev for the alleged ritual murder of a Christian boy. The Beiliss Affair caused an international scandal, and Mendel Beiliss was acquitted) or the Doctors’ Affair in 1953, instigated by Stalin, easily destroy such naïve assertions like a house of cards.

In the Soviet Union, the imperial Russian legacy of anti-Semitism apparently survived into the postwar period. After the World War II, Stalin’s growing paranoia manifested itself in plans for another purge. In January 1953, Stalin ordered the arrest of a group of Kremlin doctors on charges of plotting the medical murder of high-level Soviet officials. Fifteen doctors, most of them Jewish, were arrested and charged with poisoning Party leaders on orders from the American Joint Distribution Committee, a Zionist organization. The charges were withdrawn after Stalin’s death in the same year. Yet, the Soviet campaign against Jews intensified. Maleficium still seems deeply embedded in East European popular consciousness—starting with the prejudice that holds that Jews use the blood of Christian babies for their rituals and ending with political trials or manifestations that explicitly describe Jewry as a clandestine and treacherous force (see Cohn, 1975, 1981; Donskis, 2003).

Needless to point out, perhaps, such a culture of determinism is deeply embedded in Lithuanian culture. Over the past fifteen years, Lithuania has gone through a profound transition: Old certainties have vanished or faced delegitimization, which makes it just too tempting
for some people to search for scapegoats to hold responsible for the hardships of post-Communist transformation and for the uncertainties of globalization.

Lithuania enjoys a fine and extensive history of multiethnic, multireligious, and multicultural coexistence, steeped in Renaissance and Baroque Europe. Whatever separates political imagination from the realities, or whatever gap there is between historical facts and selective memory, the truth is that Lithuanian political culture since 1990 has demonstrated a renewed political willingness and an ability to accommodate minorities, their languages, and cultures. Lithuanian mainstream politics has had much success in embracing—or at least not alienating—the Russian, Ukrainian, and Belarusian minorities. Lithuania has even become a refuge against censorship and political persecution in neighboring states. Moreover, the presence of small groups, such as the Karaims and Roma, is not causing tensions.

Yet, the parallel existence of Lithuanian and Jewish cultures is something far more problematic, and it has been so for centuries. Anti-Semitism is by no means the only attitude toward the Jews that can be accurately assigned to Lithuanians. The predominant attitude may better be described as insensitivity to—and defensiveness about—certain inconvenient aspects of the past. It should, however, be stressed that exclusion and alienation became the fate of Jews throughout Central and Eastern Europe and should consequently not be seen as confined to Lithuania.

One of the most puzzling and even disturbing phenomena in modern Lithuania is the parallel existence of Lithuanian and Jewish cultures. These two cultures may never have achieved mutual understanding, to say nothing of achieving an interpretive framework within which to embrace, or critically question, one another. Lithuania was the birthplace for an internationally eminent Jewish community, including great artists, scholars, and philosophers, such as Soutine, Lipchitz, Krémègne, Kikoine, Arbitblatas, Berenson, Lévinas, and Gurwitsch.

Yet, none of these individuals were ever considered to be significant actors in Lithuanian national life—even though it was they who inscribed Lithuania’s name on the intellectual and cultural map of the twentieth-century world. Why? The answer is very simple: The Russian-speaking and Yiddish-speaking Jewish community in Lithuania was always alienated from the Lithuanian interwar intelligentsia, which, for its part, cultivated linguistic and cultural nationalism both as a means of self-definition and as a way of distinguishing rurally oriented Lithuanian compatriots (the organic community, or, in Ferdinand Tönnies’s terms, Gemeinschaft) from “rootless,” cosmopolitan and urban professionals.
Even though quite a few Lithuanian intellectuals and common people were sympathetic to them, Jews and other “aliens” were excluded from the Lithuanian cultural/intellectual mainstream. The explicitly Lithuanian intelligentsia decided who belonged to the nation, which they perceived as the embodiment of a historical-cultural project rather than as an empirically identifiable social reality.

The problem for Lithuanian Jews is that quite a large sector of Lithuanian society, including not a few representatives of the intelligentsia, is still inclined to consider the Jews as collectively responsible for the mass killings and deportations of civilians, as well as for other atrocities committed during the Soviet occupation on the eve of World War II. This tendency represents a disgraceful adoption of the Nazi rhetoric that equated “Communism” with “the Jews.” In an effort to modify the charges that Lithuanians participated in the mass killings of Jews in 1941 and after, some Lithuanians have spoken of “two genocides,” or—as some Jewish writers have called it—a “symmetry” in the suffering among both peoples (see Venclova, 1999; Shtromas, 2003).

This notorious theory of a “historic guilt” of Lithuanian Jews, which up to now has been deeply embedded in Lithuanian political discourse and popular consciousness, claims that the local Jewry was disloyal and unpatriotic toward Lithuania on the eve of World War II and ultimately was instrumental for the Soviet occupation of Lithuania. Hence, the derivative theory of “two genocides,” which provides an assessment of the Holocaust and of local collaborators of the Nazis in terms of revenge for the Soviet genocide of Lithuanian nationals. It is little wonder, then, that the theory of “two genocides”—which is just another term for the theory of “collective guilt of the Jews”—has been qualified by Tomas Venclova, an eminent Lithuanian poet and Yale scholar, as “troglodytic,” thus characterizing people who are still inclined to practice it as “moral troglodytes” (see Donskis, 2005b).

Regrettably, after 1990, Lithuania has failed to bring war criminals to justice and to provide an unambiguous legal assessment of those Lithuanians who were active in the Holocaust. Unrepentance and lack of sensitivity are hardly the only reasons for that. The point is that many Lithuanians are still inclined to portray their country as an absolute victim of the twentieth century, without giving much consideration to the political faults and moral evils committed by their compatriots to their fellow Jewish citizens (see Silbajoris, 1983; Donskis, 2002).
Unequipped with more “sophisticated” forms of anti-Semitism, such as Holocaust denial or revisionist versions of World War II history, Lithuanian anti-Semitism remains deeply grounded in a sort of ideological and political demonology that was characteristic of the second half of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century—or, sociologically speaking, in the all-too-familiar dilemmas and uncertainties of modernity (see Nikzentaitis, Schreiner, and Staliunas, 2004).

On the eve of the Second World War, Antanas Maceina—then a young docent of philosophy at Vytautas Magnus University—simultaneously leaned toward Bolshevism and National Socialism, which both, in his terms, embodied the spirit of Prometheanism that was incompatible with that of the bourgeoisie. What lay behind such an intellectual and moral stance is unclear, though Maceina’s conscious acceptance of the Nazis’ ideological idioms and propaganda was surely pivotal. Maceina was the architect of the Lithuanian Activist Front’s (LAF) ideological program, which inspired the provisional government of Lithuania and stood behind the June 1941 anti-Soviet uprising. Indeed, this contribution to the ideological platform of the LAF was acknowledged by Kazys Skirpa, the Lithuanian ambassador to Nazi Germany before World War II, under whose supervision the LAF was established (see Skirpa, 1973, 573).

In the 1941 LAF’s program for the liberation of Lithuania from the Soviet Union, Maceina identified the following priorities:

1. the preservation of the Lithuanian nation’s racial purity;
2. the encouragement of Lithuanian women in the accomplishment of their paramount mission—to provide the nation with as many healthy newborns as possible;
3. the promotion of Lithuanian ethnic domination in the country’s largest cities;
4. the strict and uncompromising battle against trends within Lithuanian culture that are insufficiently loyal to and respectful of Lithuanian-ness, and which do not hold the nation and national cohesion to be the first priority in all matters (ibid., 567–72).

Maceina was most explicit on the latter issue in his article, “The Nation and the State,” published in 1939: “The most important feature of the state is its cohesion … The existence of the new state is founded not on the citizen, but on the Lithuanian compatriot …
The state, being the reification of the nation, cannot treat foreigners, or so-called ethnic minorities, in the same way that it treats Lithuanian compatriots” (cited in Donskis, 2002, 28).

In terms of his doctrinaire stance and his spread of reactionary ideas, Maceina was far from unique in the context of interwar Europe. We might recall developments in Europe before World War II, when such forms of ideological influence and mass indoctrination were widespread throughout Western and Central/Eastern Europe. However, to caricature or to demonize Maceina is the last thing I would do. Maceina should be credited for admitting his fallacies. Having established himself as professor of philosophy in Germany after the World War II, Maceina critically reconsidered his mystically revolutionary prophecies regarding the inexorable downfall of the bourgeoisie and of liberal democracy. He summed up his former propensity to prophesy as a total failure (see Donskis, 2002; Donskis, 2005a).

It was Vytautas Kavolis who urged current Lithuanian scholars to make an analytic comparison of Maceina’s ideas with those of Romania’s “1927 Generation.” First of all, the thinking of the 1927 Generation—including Nae Ionescu, Emil Cioran, Mircea Vulcanescu, Constantin Noica, Mircea Eliade, and Eugène Ionesco—can be seen as a model of Central/East European intellectual movements in general. They provided numerous explanations for the origins of the Romanian nation. They wrote and spoke in the context of never-ending intellectual debates about how to contextualize the nation historically and culturally: While attempting, desperately, to choose between East and West, Romanian intellectuals developed Western, Oriental, that is, based on Greek Orthodox theological traditions, Roman, and Dacian, or indigenous, versions and interpretations of the origins of their nation.

The 1927 Generation’s members conceived their theories, doctrines, myths, and even their poetry, in terms of the ideological tension between East and West. Thus, it is possible to identify streams of consciousness that are paradigmatic of Central/East European nationalist movements—structural isomorphisms or, in Raymond Williams’s terms, the structures of sentiments inherent in Central/East European consciousness (see Verdery, 1990, 81–111; Tismaneanu and Pavel, 1994, 402–38).

Second, the 1927 Generation dedicated itself to the search for the most appropriate ideological framework for the Romanian nation’s pursuit of its historic mission. However, ethnocracy, messianism, rigid and militant anti-Semitism, conscious indoctrination of society, the creation of an ideocratic community and a theocratic state, and
so on, do not accurately describe the reactionary attitudes shared, even promoted by the Generation. They, not others, were the leading intellectuals who welcomed Ion Antonescu’s regime. In this respect, the 1927 Generation can be legitimately compared with its counterpart in France, the Action Française movement headed by the Generation’s French alter egos, Léon Daudet and Charles Maurras, and profoundly influenced by Maurice Barrès.

As for the forms of ideological influence and mass indoctrination that were widespread throughout Western and Central/Eastern Europe at that time, it would be useful to take a closer look at some stereotypes that the Lithuanian émigré philosopher Juozas Girnius made use of. In his postwar essay, “The Problem of the Lithuanian Character,” Girnius employed a theory to shore them up. These stereotypes have, at the very least, quite unpleasant political and moral implications.

For example, after commenting on Niccolò Machiavelli’s famous lion and fox metaphors, Girnius states that Lithuanians are not sly as foxes nor fearsome as lions—in other words, the Lithuanian human material is too noble to confirm to Machiavelli’s cynical theoretical claims. Hence, Girnius’s insight into Lithuanians’ particular tolerance of foreigners, especially Jews:

It is impossible for our human character to be the first, or the second, neither lion nor fox. We cannot be lions not only because we are not a large nation, but, first of all, because in cherishing our freedom, we cannot refuse to cherish the freedom of others. Our country’s politics of minorities undoubtedly testifies to the fact that our “un-lionness” does not spring only from our nation’s smallness and the weakness of our state’s power. Even if we lacked enough power to attack our neighbors, we still had enough to abuse our minorities. However, not for a single minority group (albeit the loyalty of some for us was very problematic) did we deny the right to live an individual life freely. Our political tolerance is especially well testified by our relationship with the Jewish minority. Although this minority group had an unequivocal stranglehold on the practical spheres of economic life (trade and industry) and could have been a strong basis for antisemitism, however, not even during the most passionate period of antisemitism in the neighboring Reich did antisemitism find any stronger reverberations in Lithuania. The Jewish minority lived freely. True, during the first period of occupation, many people of this minority did not pass the exam of loyalty to the Lithuanian nation, becoming the invader’s collaborators in devastating the Lithuanian nation. However, when, one year later, the second invader began its inhumane terror against Jews, the Lithuanian nation met it
with a deep feeling of disgust, because, in our understanding, what is inhumane is inhumane, be it done to one of us, to a stranger, or, in the end, to an enemy. (cited in Donskis, 2005a, 119–20)

After such reasoning and such a demonstration of tolerance, only one question remains: Should we be taken aback that this position regarding Jews became almost universally accepted in Lithuania and among its émigré community, since it was enunciated—in black and white—by a celebrated Lithuanian philosopher and cultural hero? After all, Girnius’s logic is transfused with a few stereotypes, which were used in constructing this public text, laying out a theory of Jewish disloyalty and treason against Lithuania.

In short, it claims that in Lithuania there had never been anti-Semitism; there were only disloyal Jews, who betrayed their country and en bloc went along with the Bolshevik occupation. The Jews failed the loyalty exam and betrayed their country, but even this did not give rise to a wave of anti-Semitism in Lithuania. Nevertheless, the massacre of Jews that took place during the years of war brought on great anguish for Lithuanians and awakened a deep sympathy in them (though Jews were enemies, and, at the same time, economic exploiters).

Unfortunately, this interpretation of twentieth-century history, suggested by Girnius, reads like a compendium of Joseph Goebbels’s propaganda gems and Lithuanian anti-Semitic stereotypes. What causes astonishment is how it entered the field of Girnius’s discourse. Could it be that Girnius sincerely believed what he was writing? Or was it just his articulation of a secret feeling that a mass annihilation of the Lithuanian Jews—rationally inexplicable, and strikingly rapid, as well as technically “effective”—had raised fears in Lithuania and among émigrés that Lithuanians’ collaboration with the Nazis could have destroyed any kind of sympathy for Lithuania among Western allies, as well as compassion for the tragedy that had befallen it?

The following passage shows the descent into national self-congratulation, one-sided propaganda, a biased worldview, and, finally, an unconditional defense of one’s nation and country—even as it blatantly ignores facts and historical, as well as political, realities:

That which we hold to be just, we defend in open battle, even though an opportunistic flexibility would let us hope to avoid one or several victims. We do not know how to be “realistic.” We did not go red and did not hide in brown as the “realistic” countries did. We did not know how to bow our head to injustice. Our heads stand too erect for them to be swayed by every gust of wind. Our hearts are too sensitive to
injustice for us to tolerate injustice with closed eyes and plugged ears. Our chests have always been stripped bare to the blows of invaders. Are we not, besides Poland, the only country occupied by the Nazis, from which even the brown terror has not been able to squeeze out even a single SS legion?! (cited in ibid., 121)

Today such a historical interpretation would provoke a smile among Lithuanian or other European historians. At any rate, this interpretation of the turmoil of the twentieth century, suggested by Girnius, has completely transfused the popular consciousness and has become an almost universally accepted (often even official) position of Lithuanian society when evaluating the World War II and the social and political turmoil it brought. Any attempts to assess the Lithuanian moral and political attitude during the occupation and the World War II differently are deftly condemned as expressions of disloyalty: If, unfortunately, the facts tell another story, so what, too bad for the facts! Thus, it is hardly surprising that instead of having an open and critical interpretation of the twentieth century it has become acceptable to rely on half-truths and selective historical memory: A defensive mythology presides over factuality.

Undoubtedly, Girnius played a significant part in constructing this do-or-die paradigm that sought to protect the country from an unfavorable or “unpatriotic” (and, hence, hostile) historical interpretation. If Lithuanians, according to Girnius, never reddened or darkened, then it is clear that all the social and political turmoil that took place in twentieth-century Lithuania was the outcome of activities conducted by hostile forces and fifth columnists. It only remains to name those disloyal and treacherous forces: Needless to say, they were Jews. What remains unclear after reading “The Problem of the Lithuanian Character,” however, is why so many supposedly “innocent” Lithuanians happened to lend their support to Antanas Smetona’s dictatorship or, for that matter, totalitarian ideologies of different shades.

This aspect sheds new light on Girnius’s attempts to expose prejudices, superstitions, and taboos deeply embedded in modern Lithuanian politics and culture. One of these taboos is the role and place of the Lithuanian Activist Front in the 1941 uprising to restore Lithuania’s independence and in the spread of anti-Semitic propaganda in Lithuania. In 1941, the provisional government of Lithuania started playing a complicated game with the Nazis, sincerely hoping to restore Lithuania’s independence.

The game, as Tomas Venclova noted, was inexorably doomed to failure. It is difficult to imagine something more dubious than
choosing between Stalin and Hitler. The point to be stressed here is that the provisional government undoubtedly took its cue from the LAF. Unfortunately, though, members of the LAF also launched anti-Semitic propaganda, employing the usual repertoire of Nazi rhetoric, like “the Judeo-Bolshevik conspiracy,” “a plot of Jewish bankers and communists,” “the Jewish yoke and exploitation,” and the like.

Venclova quotes from an editorial in *Naujoji Lietuva (The New Lithuania)*, July 4, 1941: “The greatest enemy of Lithuania and other nations was and in some places remains a Jew … Today, as a result of the genius of Adolf Hitler … we are free from the Jewish yoke … A New Lithuania, after joining a New Europe of Adolf Hitler, must be clean from Jews … To exterminate the Jewry and Communism along with it is a primary task of the New Lithuania” (cited in Venclova, 1995, 365).

This is not to say that the entire 1941 uprising should be regarded as an overture to the Holocaust. But its fallacies and grave mistakes have to be admitted. Venclova was the first to do this. In his articles, he openly challenged the romanticized and patriotic version of World War II history, which tends to glamorize both the LAF and the 1941 uprising, thus calling for a transvaluation of those values. Quoting from editorials in wartime Lithuanian newspapers, Venclova showed in black and white that some Lithuanian politicians, intellectuals, and ordinary citizens on the eve of World War II were influenced by Nazism. Moreover, Venclova implied that they, by choosing and joining Nazism, betrayed Lithuania and also turned down the values of the democratic world. Needless to say, the conservative and ultrapatriotic circles, particularly among émigrés, reacted noisily to Venclova’s devastating criticism of Lithuanian anti-Semitism, thus adding insult to injury.

In the Soviet Union—trailing in the footsteps of Tsarist Russia, with which Soviet legislation closed ranks, sharing the exclusionary, discriminatory numeros clausus rule and practice—anti-Semitism was lifted to the status of state policy, starting from a constant denial of the Holocaust and a fixed Soviet interpretation of World War II history, which described Jews exterminated by the Nazis simply as “Soviet citizens,” and ending with outright hostility toward the Israeli state and an active support for its foes.

This should not surprise anyone more or less familiar with the history of the Soviet Union, especially bearing in mind Stalin’s anti-Semitism and the political persecution of Jewish rabbis and intellectuals in the 1950s. Recalling the infamous principle of numeros clausus of imperial Russia Stalin curtailed educational opportunities for Jewish youths. Even after the Holocaust, the Soviet Union and its satellites
brutally destroyed a significant part of Jewish culture in Eastern and Central Europe, abolishing Jewish schools, synagogues, and cultural institutions, in addition to exiling and even murdering rabbis and Jewish intellectuals.

The Soviet republics could hardly escape Kremlin’s hard-lined approach and brutal treatment of Jews. Even so, Soviet Lithuania was known for its comparatively soft approach toward Jews: It was, for instance, an open secret that, it was easier to repatriate to Israel from Lithuania than from anywhere else in the Soviet Union by the 1970s. The story of Ichokas Meras, a Holocaust survivor saved by a Lithuanian family, may shed some light on this factor. Meras is a Lithuanian writer of Jewish background and, most probably, the only Israeli writer to write his short stories and novels in Lithuanian. He emigrated to Israel in 1972 and was followed by many others.

Sadly, there were very few Litvaks or their descendants left in Lithuania, but many Russian-speaking Jews settled in Lithuania in the 1960s and 1970s, precisely because of a more humane attitude toward them. A curious detail could be offered as an illustration of this. When the Six Day War between Israel and Egypt broke out in 1967, many ordinary Lithuanians openly supported Israel, thus showing sympathy for a small state so intensely hated and demonized by the Soviet regime.

Although anti-Semitism remained a burning issue in neighboring Poland—a country that bears much resemblance to Lithuania in terms of historical-political sentiments and culture of memory—overt anti-Semitism never manifested itself in Soviet Lithuania. In spite of many quite similar social and cultural developments of the two countries, anti-Semitism was never as intense in postwar Lithuania as in Poland, where it reached a climax in 1968 when Jews were purged from high-ranking state and academic positions (which also happened in Soviet Russia in the 1970s). It had little, if anything, to do with moderate or ferocious forms of anti-Semitism or generosity. On that point, the difference between Poland and Lithuania laid elsewhere. Lithuanian anti-Semitism was restricted by its Soviet forms, whereas Polish anti-Semitism was considerably more reminiscent of typical modern European anti-Semitism.

What happened in the Soviet Union after World War II was that all Jewish history, including the Shoah, disappeared from public life, leaving very few traces. Jews were stigmatized everywhere, the term “Jewish” became pejorative, and the entire Jewish life was marginalized and uprooted. Small wonder, then, that many Lithuanians were, and continue to be, ignorant of World War II and of the Jewish
catastrophe—the younger generations, in particular. What is much worse, in Lithuania this ignorance is systematically used and cynically exploited by some unscrupulous media persons. The best example of this disturbing tendency is illustrated by Vitas Tomkus, editor-in-chief of the daily Respublika, which I will return to shortly.

After the declaration of independence in 1990, a new era began for Lithuania—with all its joys, hardships, and burdens. The political and moral enthusiasm of the late 1980s gradually gave way to political apathy and frustration. At the same time, the frustration and anger felt by many people who were ignorant of the Holocaust and the tragic history of the twentieth century in general were fueled by political debates and information, which for most people emerged out of the blue and which insisted that some Lithuanians participated in the mass extermination of their fellow citizens, Lithuanian Jews.

In addition to a complex and painful experience of socioeconomic and political transformation, a process that began with the collapse of the Soviet Union, Lithuanian society is, to a great extent, suffering from the unholy trinity of modernity—uncertainty, unsafety, and insecurity. The arrival of independent Lithuania in an uncertain, unsafe, and insecure world of modernity was also accompanied by the loss of old certainties, embodied in the failed Soviet project.

In 1996, Kavolis asked rhetorically whether a culture of poverty—in Oscar Lewis’s terms—exists in Lithuania (see Lewis, 1996, 21724). In fact, there is ample evidence that such a culture is well-established: Recent sociological polls suggest that a strong sense of helplessness, fatalism, and failure is accompanied by a growing hostility to liberal democracy and democratic institutions. A good proportion of Lithuanians would favor authoritarianism above parliamentary democracy, deeming rule by a strong leader as preferable to the rule of law, representation, and divisions of powers. Powers of association have deteriorated considerably, while growing social atomization and fragmentation point to the existence of new forms of cultural colonization, isolation, and marginalization.

The Soviet regime seems to have transformed Lithuania into a low-trust nation, where a lack of faith in existing institutions threatens the fragile foundations of civil society, yet where people, oddly enough, place enormous trust in the media, and in TV in particular. The bewildering pace of economic and sociocultural change has exacerbated such trends over the past decade and a half. People of the older generation often feel that their lives have been ruined, if not totally wasted. Many of them have lost their jobs and savings. Their children may have left the country and settled in Ireland or Spain, while they have
to stay behind and live on a meager pension. It is hardly possible to convince these people that Lithuania has a vibrant economy or that it is “a Baltic tiger” (as former Polish finance minister Leszek Balcerowicz described it). While such claims seem valid for certain groups, quite a large segment of Lithuanian society currently lives beyond the “EU reality.”

Lithuania today has the highest suicide rate in the world—an alarming fact that sheds new light on the extent of social depression, alienation, and despair in society. Moreover, growing emigration has deprived the country of many young and highly qualified people. More than 500,000 have left Lithuania over the past ten years, settling in the United States, Great Britain, Ireland, and other Western European countries. The country has lost much in terms of human resources, while the countryside in particular has been denied any prospect of rapid economic and social development. In recent years, political commentators and politicians have begun to speak of “two Lithuanias”—a westward-looking and economically vibrant Lithuania, celebrating its dynamism and rejoicing over accession to North Atlantic Treaty Organization, or NATO, and the European Union, versus an elite-abandoned, long-suffering, divided, and depressed Lithuania, longing for something akin to the “equality in misery” that many people remember from Soviet times.

In view of these developments, many commentators have diagnosed Lithuania as suffering from a new social disease characterized by identity crisis, amnesia, political illiteracy, the loss of a sense of history, and, ultimately, the decline of national pride. The fragmentation and segmentation of Lithuanian society threatens democracy as well cohesion and civic solidarity. Not least, growing social divisions have opened up fertile ground for populism, as events since 2002 can attest.

In fact, such a state of affairs does not bode very well for Lithuanian Jews. Political frustration and anger combined with uncertainty and emotional insecurity often call for symbolic compensation and scapegoating. Jews have always been a perfect target group for scapegoating and for politics of discontent in general. This could be the case also in contemporary Lithuania. It would be more than naïve to deny the fact that anti-Semitism remains persistent and strong in contemporary Lithuania. Its ugly face tends to appear in the guise of the most simplistic and primitive versions of anti-Communism, not to mention the myriad ways it lurks behind conspiracy theories of various shades, including a new European disease: An exaggerated anti-Israeli stance, which misrepresents the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and attempts to delegitimize the state of Israel.
The emergence of this new form of anti-Semitism makes itself present in Lithuania as well. It might often be found in Western Europe and North America, where a sort of camouflaged, antiglobalist, leftist, politically correct, and anti-Israeli sentiment tends to close ranks with more traditional anti-Semitic prejudices. Unfortunately, this new disease has not bypassed Lithuania.

Each time an Israeli official or any person from the Simon Wiesenthal Center in Jerusalem mentions that Lithuania has failed to bring World War II criminals to justice, or that anti-Semitism is present in the Lithuanian mass media, newspapers and Internet sites fill up with angry comments and bitter remarks about the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. Most of these comments are only vaguely related to the issue and, instead, target Lithuanian Jews.

For instance, after an official visit of the Speaker of Israel’s Knesset in 2004, which was politically charged from beginning to end, journalist Aras Luksas went online to start a debate with anonymous chat commentators, challenging them in harsh words and opposing their poisonous anti-Semitic insinuations. Later he was charged with the instigation of ethnic hatred and faced a penalty. When public opinion was mobilized to support Luksas, the prosecutor general admitted the mistake of the Prosecutor General Office, calling it a confusion of good and evil.

Also in 2004, the aforementioned Vitas Tomkus, editor-in-chief of the daily Respublika, published a series of editorials mocking Jews and gays, describing them as the most powerful interest groups that still rule the world. These stupid remarks would not be worthy of attention if it was not for a curious detail. Some cartoons were added to editorials, in which a skinny, crooked-nosed Jew was depicted beside a gay person, reminiscent of a Nazi cartoon in Julius Streicher’s Der Stürmer. The Jewish Community of Lithuania brought charges against Tomkus, evoking a big political scandal; yet, the outcome was stunning. Recently, Tomkus, who was fined for verbal abuse of Lithuanian Jews with 3,000 Litas (approximately 860 Euros), made an appeal and was acquitted. It is difficult to add anything to this account, except that nothing could discredit the Republic of Lithuania more than stories like these.

Yet, this was not the end of the ghost chase. In 2005, Respublika launched a series of massive attacks on the nongovernment organizations and civil/human rights activists of Lithuania, mockingly describing them as “Sorosologists,” that is, adherents of George Soros’s notion of an open society, which led him to launch a network of Open Society Funds throughout Central and Eastern Europe in the
early 1990s. The insinuation that these “treachery and subversive” activities—allegedly inspired by a rootless, cosmopolitan, and wealthy Jew—alienated Lithuania from its historical-cultural legacy and ethnic sensibilities, was straight out of the ideological repertoire of the nineteenth century: The mythology and demonology of Jewish capitalists, bankers, and liberals. Judging by the easily identifiable idiom and political vocabulary, it was hardly surprising, then, that a series of the aforementioned lampoons came out much around the same time as Russian authorities began blaming the “Rose Revolution” in Georgia and the “Orange Revolution” in Ukraine on nongovernment organizations in general and Soros in particular.

In addition, a new disturbing tendency has recently appeared in Lithuania. To use the eminent scholar of Yiddish Dovid Katz’s words, this tendency may best be described as the “Holocaust Obfuscation Movement” whose essence lies in subversion of the logic and evidence of the Holocaust, whitewashing or at least selectively reading history of World War II, and drastically shifting the roles of victims and evil-doers (see http://www.economist.com/world/europe/displaystory.cfm?story_id=11958563).

The legal prosecution of former Soviet partisans of Jewish background, in present Lithuania, on the grounds of war crimes allegedly committed against Lithuanians—Yitzchak Arad, an Israeli historian born in Lithuania, and two ladies in their eighties, Fania Brantsovsky (Brantsovskaya) and Rachel Margolis, cannot be described otherwise than as a morally repugnant attempt to blame the victims of the Holocaust for war crimes by manipulating historical facts, images, and stereotypes of World War II. When Holocaust survivors, who had no other option during World War II than to join the Soviet partisan movement are suspected of war crimes, we reach the climax of the innocence and victimization syndrome, a new variety of blaming the victims—a grimace of a modern amoral culture, or the culture of determinism, in Kavolis’s parlance.

My working hypothesis would be that all these antimodernist, antiliberal, anticosmopolitan, and anti-Semitic stances are merely different names for the same thing. Within the framework of defensive nationalism, these phenomena and the terms referring to them, such as “capitalism,” “the bourgeoisie,” “secularization,” “liberalism,” “liberal democracy,” “cosmopolitanism,” “the Jews,” and “the West,” are all combined under the same rubric of self-and-civilization. George Schöpflin explains how deeply this anti-Western idiom of self-and-civilization is entrenched in Central and Eastern European consciousness:
Anti-Semitism is not an automatic corollary of this set of attitudes, but the Jewish question inevitably became linked with the role of the populists because, as a result of the very particular patterns of Central European history, Jews were among the primary modernisers in the nineteenth century and came to be seen as the bearers of the alien values of modernity, albeit this was least true of the Czech lands. Some, though not by any manner of means all, of the populists brought anti-Semitism back to the political agenda, by in effect arguing that Jews could not become members of the nation, inasmuch as their ideas in politics were suspect and alien … Thus there were unmistakable hints in some of these ideas that the establishment of a liberal democracy was tantamount to an attempt by Jewish liberals “to ‘assimilate’ the nation to its style and thinking.” (Schöpflin, 1993, 296)

Recalling Erich Fromm’s analysis of the suppression of the irrational doubt during the emergence of capitalism, we could safely assume that the loss of certainty, safety, and security, in a society undergoing a radical social, economic, and political transformation, calls for compensation. Present attempts to eliminate the irrational doubt and fear, or to attract the scared and isolated individuals suffering from anxiety and hatred, are made by introducing or forging new certainties—telling success stories, praising the political elite for its extremely ambitious and successful foreign policies, showing the misery of other countries, or, most importantly, channeling the anguish and anxiety into hatred.

Yet to confine the production of hatred to the New Europe, in Donald Rumsfeld’s parlance, is the last thing I would do. The Old Europe is no better at this point: Recall Silvio Berlusconi’s and Roberto Maroni’s anti-immigration rhetoric in Italy or Nicolas Sarkozy’s success in promising to struggle against illegal immigration and to put it on the political agenda. The production of moral panic, fear, and hatred, as a tool of the political mobilization of a militant and patriotic sentiment, originates in self-fulfilling prophecies, no matter how well-documented and professionally written, such as Samuel P. Huntington’s recent book on American identity (see Huntington, 2005) or his best-selling prophecy of the clash of civilizations (see Huntington, 2003), and ends in George W. Bush–like brutal politics. The “defense of civilization” discourse and the manufacturing of an enemy are interconnected and causally dependent on each other, as are the need for a strong identity and the resulting communicative-cultural production of threats to it.

The fear and hatred of immigrants and refugees, in Western societies, is a projection of the misery of our own modern and global condition. Fearing and hating the intrinsic logic of modernity and
globalization, we find no better way to overcome our anxiety than by channeling it into disdain and distaste for “thieving and killing” immigrants. In Eastern Europe, the misery, ambiguity, and unpredictability of the modern condition is still quite frequently projected onto the Jews, no matter whether real or imagined.

The same holds for a strong nostalgia for the black-and-white social optics that leads to glorification of the past with its dichotomies at hand. The need for a stronger national, religious, or ideological identity inevitably leads us back to the past where one principle or law could be pushed to the limit and translated into political action. As Bauman describes a radical transformation of the logic of power that does not allow us to know the first and last names of our enemies to be blamed for, or the main factors instrumental in, our present social condition: “… two in particular stand out as plausible explanations of the spectacular career of the ‘ideology of the end of ideology.’ The first is disengagement as the new strategy of power and domination; the second—excess as the present-day replacement for normative regulation” (Bauman, 2007a, 125).

Therefore, there is nothing to blame here. Nothing but the most familiar social idiom of being and belonging here and elsewhere at one and the same time, being without becoming, or becoming without being, remaining elusive and obvious, identifiable and secretive. The fear and loathing of this unbearable condition call for a group we know. The group that we suppose we know perfectly well even without encountering, publicly debating, or else perceiving it. In liquid modernity, fear and loathing come with the first and last names of people, groups, and locations.

**The New Anti-Semitism in the Old Europe: A Sketch on the Western Academe**

Yet ample evidence exists that anti-Semitism, especially in its more sophisticated versions—such as the fusion of anticapitalist, anti-imperialist, anti-American, anti-Zionist, and anti-Israeli sentiments, or Holocaust denial and Holocaust industry theories—is alive and well in the West. No need, therefore, to blame it solely on Eastern Europe’s historical traumas, injuries, unrepentant hostility, or insensitivity. In the guise of anti-Israeli stance or anti-Zionism (a term frequently used in the Soviet Union where anti-Semitism/anti-Zionism was elevated to the rank of a state policy), the New Anti-Semitism succeeded in transforming the worn-out and miserable clichés, that date back to
the nineteenth century, and Judophobic stereotypes into the only legitimate and politically correct form of hatred in the West.

Most telling is that Israel’s policies, which could and should be criticized in vigorous terms whenever international law or human rights are violated, become a good and sufficient reason to invite militant ideological anti-Semites, who overtly and unapologetically praise Adolf Hitler, use his winged expressions, and employ the pearls of Nazi propaganda, to deliver keynote addresses on college and university campuses during the convocation or commencement ceremonies. This was the case with Malik Shabazz (see Gabriel, 2006, 167) and several other Louis Farakhan’s disciples in the Ivy League–sponsored and politically charged academic events during which the students of Jewish background were publicly mocked and insulted (see Aufderheide, 1992).

Hatred masquerades as love and compassion. It walks in the guise of the standing for the right cause, fighting solidarity, and liberty. What goes unnoticed, though, is that we dismiss and criminalize one form of hatred, yet unleash and legitimize the others. No comparative martyrology can adequately measure human suffering and pain. The same applies to a comparative approach to the forms of hatred: They are all equal in their folly and irrationality. Islamophobia is no better than Judophobia, and Anglophobia or Americophobia is no better than Russophobia. Yet one form of hatred exists that is more equal than others, namely, anti-Semitism. The most curious thing about the New Anti-Semitism is that it seems to have become a joint enterprise of the lecturing and chattering classes, indoctrinated young people, radical and noisy left-wingers, adherents of partisan politics, and media circles. In a way, the biased academics and journalists and antidemocratic political regimes, of which anti-Semitism is an inseparable part, closed ranks.

The identification of the Jews with the bourgeois, exploitation, accumulation of wealth, money, or with a function of capitalism, is a characteristic invention of nineteenth-century Europe. Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, Eugen Karl Dühring, and Karl Marx symbolize the arrival of the epoch in which modernity was blamed on the most familiar group, the Jews, the abolition of whose ghettos and hence the resulting passport to French and German civil societies allowed a good and prominent part of the European Left to identify and articulate the hottest philosophical, sociological, and political issues of the modern world (see Donskis, 2003). Therefore, no news in the sociopolitical vocabulary of those who are still inclined to identify the Jews, Israel, and international American-Jewish organizations as the principal agents of globalization and global capitalism.
The New Anti-Semitism, disguised as anti-Zionism and anti-Israeli stance, remains the only widely accepted, politically correct, and legitimate form of hatred, a subideology of the left-wing-oriented acade me in Western Europe and North America. The reason I call this form of bias and hatred the New Anti-Semitism is an important detail that should not go unnoticed, namely, a lightly assumed and frequently used comparison of Israel and Nazi Germany or of Zionism and National Socialism. Comparing Israel to Nazi Germany, or equating Israel’s foreign policies—no matter how highly debatable and deeply problematic—to National Socialism, is tantamount, in moral terms, to prosecuting of Holocaust survivors who were Soviet partisans and fought the Nazis during World War II. What lies underneath in both cases is an attempt to rewrite history, blaming the victims for their sufferings or to recast and miscast political and historical actors, subverting the standard and criteria of moral judgment. Incidentally, such comparisons often occur in Noam Chomsky’s polemical texts (see Chesler, 2003, 151).

Of the New Anti-Semite, Phyllis Chesler writes:

The New anti-Semite is not only an illiterate or underemployed Muslim immigrant from North Africa or the Middle East who has joined a mob to torch a synagogue or to beat up Jews in Europe or North America. The new anti-Zionist or anti-Semite is also an Egyptian physician or journalist, a Saudi Arabian prince, an Iranian cleric, a North American college student or his esteemed professor, or an Islamic terrorist in Indonesia, Africa, Chechnya, Lebanon, Iraq, or Syria. The new anti-Semite can also be a European Nobel Prize winner, an international scholar, an activist, a journalist, or a poet. (ibid., 130)

The culmination of the logic of the New Anti-Semitism became a tendency, which can hardly be regarded as accidental and which betrays a belief in the collective guilt and responsibility of all Israelis for Israeli military and political policies. This variety of the culture of determinism, in Kavolis’s parlance, is a propensity of European academics to seek to punish Israeli students, academics, and intellectuals for Israeli policies in the Middle East. For instance, in 2002, European academics from twenty countries, including Israel, sponsored a petition to boycott and defund Israeli academics. They called for a moratorium of support that meant that no grants and contracts were allowed for Israel until “Israel ‘abide[s] by UN resolutions and open[s] serious peace negotiations with the Palestinians’” (cited in ibid., 131).
Obviously, nobody insists on the infallibility of Israel and its military policies in particular. Zygmunt Bauman, having mentioned a strong and uncompromising criticism of anti-Semitism as a Jewish identity formula, adds that the same applies to the criticism of Israel: “Julian Tuwim, the great Polish poet of Jewish ancestry, was known to remark that hating Polish anti-Semites more that anti-Semites of any other country was the strongest proof of his Polishness (I suppose that my Jewishness is confirmed by Israeli iniquities paining me still more than atrocities committed by other countries)” (Bauman, 2004, 11).

The criticism of our own society and culture is always an asset in the context of liberal patriotism, or liberal nationalism, if you will, yet it becomes a liability in the eyes of conservative nationalists. Whereas a harsh criticism of the debatable, inconvenient, and difficult pages of our history or present politics signifies an identity and loyalty formula as far as liberal values are concerned, it becomes a betrayal in the context of defensive and conservative nationalism (see Donskis, 2005a).

A democracy, when it slides into brutal politics and engages in exercise of power separated from politics, always causes more astonishment and disappointment among democrats than an authoritarian or totalitarian regime from which we can hardly expect something different. However, does it make any sense to stigmatize the Jews all over the world for Israel’s policies or, even worse, to punish individual Israelis for their government’s decisions? It makes as much sense as to boycott all Europeans for Europe’s treatment of the Jews over the past 600 years or to boycott all Germans for the Holocaust.

Let me take another shocking and disturbing example of disguised and concealed anti-Semitism, or the politically correct New Anti-Semitism, as Phyllis Chesler, a radical feminist, a passionate writer, a psychotherapist, and an emerita professor of psychology and women’s studies, would have it. On May 30, 2007, the United Kingdom’s largest association of universities and higher education institutions, the University and College Union, held a vote on the boycott of Israeli academic institutions. The Union did not garner enough votes for a complete blockade, but, in an effort to get feedback and spark debate, it did send out the calls by Palestinian groups to boycott Israel to its various branches. This attempt by some professional associations to boycott Israel was one of the latest shameful efforts to delegitimize Israel, which is shocking for its glaring madness. Around that time, Britain’s National Union of Journalists called for a boycott of goods from Israel; meanwhile, some British doctors and architects have proposed a boycott of Israel in their areas of professional endeavor.
This gives rise to the question, Why did Great Britain’s academics, along with its doctors and architects, propose to boycott all of their colleagues living in a democratic country? True, we have good reason to take a dim view of Israel’s policies toward the Palestinians, though there is very little that is clear-cut and uncomplicated in this regard. One can like or dislike Israel’s formula for citizenship or its identity politics, one can like or dislike the Jewish state and the ideas underpinning it (after all, no one is obligated to love Jews and Israel), but no one can succeed in proving that Israel is not a democratic state.

Would it not seem, to a scrupulous person of sound mind, that a country that has banned religious communities, that has jailed or eliminated all of its political dissidents, that persecutes people for their political beliefs, but that is expanding economically and seeing its influence in the world grow steadily—that China is a country only somewhat more problematic than Israel? Why not a boycott of China’s academic institutions then? Did the thought not cross the minds of academics seeking Israel’s delegitimization that a country that has virtually wiped out the Chechen people, which has talked openly about training the sights of its missiles on the capitals of European Union countries, which has recently invaded Georgia and then cynically accused it of alleged ethnic cleansing in the separatist regions artificially created from without to divide Georgia, which speaks with contempt about its independent journalists, ones eliminated by the state terror apparatus—Russia, which is descending into fascism, is hardly more worthy of Israel in the areas of human rights and freedoms? So why not a boycott of Russia’s academic institutions along with Russian goods?

And why not a boycott of Pakistan? After all, it is ruled by a dictator who rose to power on the back of a military coup, and its minister of foreign affairs gets away with saying he understands and morally supports suicide bombers in cases in which Islam is denigrated and belittled; he said this after England’s Queen granted a knighthood to Salman Rushdie, whose Satanic Verses put all of the world’s Islamist fanatics on a war footing.

Perhaps Iran, whose president openly calls for the physical destruction of Israel and holds contests for Holocaust deniers and anti-Semitic cartoonists, is more politically palatable than Israel to those British academics? Is a country that has allowed the publication of anti-Semitic caricatures along the lines of the Nazis’ Der Stürmer (incidentally, it is not only Iran but the Arab nations as well that have demonstrated this blatant Nazi-like view of Jews for quite some time) not more deserving of a boycott than Israel? If such acts do not shock
the Europe that eliminated its Jews, is it not time then to note that we no longer have before us that Europe that we recognize in history and books, but something completely different? Incidentally, why not—out of spite for George W. Bush’s politics and the war in Iraq—a boycott of American institutions of higher education?

But a boycott of U.S. universities would be unthinkable—they are, after all, the secret desire of the Europeans themselves. As if one would cut off the branch on which one may, and very much wish to, sit? However, boycott’s aside, universities in the United States have pulled far ahead of Europe’s in their level of excellence and financial standing and are already far more interesting for partners in China, India, and Southeast Asia than in Europe. Therefore, a boycott would, at best, give rise to a feeling of absurdity and laughter. It is much safer to take out one’s political frustrations by boycotting little Israel.

At any rate, rather than prolonging this potentially endless round robin, let us turn to the answers. There is no country in the world that deserves to have its academics boycotted. By imitating the rupture of diplomatic ties, academia quite simply betrays its mission and calling. Only a thoroughly disguised ideology of hatred can darken the mind enough to prevent one from grasping that university students and lecturers remain, even in the most heinous dictatorships, the force from which, at some point down the road, a rejection of a brutal regime and the ideas underpinning it can emanate, just as it can give birth, in general, to other viewpoints.

Not even higher education institutions in the Soviet Union were boycotted by the United States and Western Europe, especially after the 1972 agreement on cooperation and cultural exchange between the United States and USSR signed by Richard Nixon and Leonid Brezhnev. The workers’ state had hermetically sealed off its people from the world, but no one in the West ever called for a boycott of Russian scholars and their academic institutions. Would it have made any sense to boycott the Stalin era’s brilliant Mikhail Bakhtin or the great academics who came later, such as Yuri Lotman, Andrei Sakharov, and others?

Does not the hope for the humanization and reconciliation with modernity for such countries as Iran, Pakistan, China, and Russia lie precisely in education and scholarship, which break down the barriers separating humanity exactly where they are always being erected by states, politicians, and groups of true believers? Is it not rebellious students who offer us the hope for the world’s revitalization? As if political regimes and conditions could be longer lived than schooling,
scholarship, and education, which we describe with the winged phrase *ars longa, vita brevis est*?

Alan Dershowitz provides a telling picture of the demonization of Israel—the Jew among nations, in his parlance. As Dershowitz notes, “The Jewish nation of Israel stands accused in the dock of international justice. The charges include being a criminal state, the prime violator of human rights, the mirror image of Nazism, and the most intransigent barrier to peace in the Middle East. Throughout the world, from the chambers of the United Nations to the campuses of universities, Israel is singled out for condemnation, divestment, boycott, and demonization. Its leaders are threatened with prosecution as war criminals. Its supporters are charged with dual loyalty and parochialism” (Dershowitz, 2003, 1).

The attempted boycott of Israel’s academic institutions that has been put forward in Great Britain means, first, a betrayal of academia and of all of academic Europe. If one is determined to denigrate one’s professional friend only because of the government and policies of his or her country, one that you dislike, then that Europe in which scholars and artists befriended each other and created art together, even when their governments were at odds or fighting bitter wars, dies in that same instant: Recall the friendship between Peter Paul Rubens and Diego Velázquez—the friendship between a diplomat and painter of Antwerp and a painter of the Spanish royal household. Not to mention Elizabethan England, which fought fiercely with its archrival Spain but which nonetheless admired Spanish literature, translating copiously into the English language the works of Lope de Vega, Tirso de Molina, Pedro Calderon, and Miguel de Cervantes. In England, the revered Lope de Vega in 1588 fought against the English as part of the Spanish Armada. And after the battle of Jena in 1806 Fichte and Hegel may have openly expressed their distaste for Napoleon’s Imperial France, but they never stopped admiring French culture.

Such was Europe for many centuries where political tension and conflict never hindered the people from embracing another country’s higher culture and never blocked the paths of creative people. Today’s modern barbarity has thrown down the gauntlet to Europe, by offering to appraise them not as individuals, but pigeonhole them according to their citizenship and state ideology, while at the same time holding them responsible for all the sins of hating modernity.

This logic has given birth in Europe to an obsessive anti-Americanism, which is nothing more or nothing less than antimodernist and anti-globalist obsession, identifying the United States with the entirety of the current world order, or more precisely, its nonorder, and which considers
the United States the personification of globalization. This same logic has spawned a hatred of Israel. According to this view, Israel has arisen as an extension and instrument of the United States’ hegemony over the world.

But when one peels away the noisy rhetoric, its essence is made even more blatant: A belief that the Jews rule the world through their organizations and that they are synonymous with the bourgeoisie and capitalism—a throwback to the nineteenth-century fantasies of French and German socialists. As mentioned, the anti-Semitism of Europe’s lecturing and chattering classes, by resurrecting an entire seam of anti-Semitic stereotypes in Europe’s political imagination and memory, will pave the way for a new genocide sooner or later unless someone puts a halt to it. After all, this seam has never died and is, today, only dormant or else carefully disguised.

In seeking to grasp this phenomenon, it is worth recalling George Orwell’s thought that, not infrequently, some doctrinaire leftists quietly worship the successful use of violence elsewhere precisely because they secretly admire the alternative to the modernity and liberal democracy they despise. The use of violence and force at home, that is, in a democratic system, is not tolerated, but if it is applied to liberate one from the West’s influence, then violence, in their eyes becomes something else—a fight for freedom, solidarity, a justifiable measure, and so forth.

**Self-Hatred**

In a way, Jewish self-hatred originated as a cultural virus spread by the Viennese Jews in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, although it was to extend far beyond Austria. Jewish self-hatred, or Jewish anti-Semitism, was aptly described by the German-Jewish writer Theodor Lessing (who also coined the term *jüdischer Selbsthass*). Later Isaiah Berlin would reinterpret this phenomenon in an extremely provocative way, comparing two masks/uniforms of an improvised identity presented in social carnival and also two modes of self-representation, one of them applied by Benjamin Disraeli, another by Karl Marx (see Berlin, 2001, 252–86).

They both needed a new identity to be able to escape from the tensions of the nineteenth century and from the lot of European Jews who were promised everything—emancipation, liberty, a safe retreat from the oppressive tradition and humiliating life in ghettos, whether real or metaphorical, and who entered the Wonderland of Modernity only to reveal that they were alien to it. Finding oneself in
no-man’s-land and writing one’s autobiography in the blank pages of history and identity was unbearable.

Disraeli invented his biography and created a myth to conform to one part of modern political and moral sensibilities that led him safely to his imagined community—that of the roots, aristocracy, and tradition; Marx came up with his own version of imagined communities, inventing social classes as incessant antagonists of human history and speaking up for the community of the dispossessed and humiliated. His was a world of the uprooted. Both used their Jewish background, though in radically different and mutually exclusive ways. Disraeli was nearly obsessed with his supposedly aristocratic Jewishness as the utmost spiritual principle that allowed the ancient tribe to outlive its enemies and to preserve its historically formed collective self from the biblical to the modern times, whereas Marx regarded Jewishness as a mere function of capitalism and as a preposterous obstacle to the history-free world of rationality and liberty, human emancipation and self-fulfillment.

With sound reason, Isaiah Berlin described Marx as an ideological anti-Semite tinged with self-hatred. Jewish self-contempt and self-hatred appear to have originated as a characteristically Central and East European phenomenon, which stressed the failure of talented Jews to get rid of ugly anti-Semitic stereotyping that was deeply embedded in European societies. Jewish self-hatred also sprang from their acceptance of the modes of discourse and the images of societal life full of modern anti-Semitic references, innuendoes, and clichés. Thus, the modernity of anti-Semitism has acquired its plane in the philosophy of history. It is especially true of a sinister tendency of nineteenth-century consciousness imposed by gentile societies on some emancipated European Jews. The essence of this tendency lies in an attempt to personify sociopolitical reality and its major processes—such as scientific, technological, and religious “rationalizations” of the modern world—and then project them onto the most familiar and recognizable idiom of otherness, the Jews.

Exactly the same might be said about the propensity to refer to the Jews as “rootless,” “immoral,” “profit-calculating,” “insensitive,” “incapable of patriotism,” “alien to the modern intellectual and moral sensibilities,” “devoid of aesthetic sense,” and the like. At this point, suffice it to recall Karl Marx, Heinrich Heine, Walther Rathenau, Arthur Trebitsch, Otto Weininger, and Ludwig Wittgenstein. Even Simone Weil’s moving and penetrating essays are tinged with the denial of Jewish self and identity, which is one of the effects of Jewish self-hatred and modern anti-Semitism. We could recall this extremely
destructive feeling—the triumph of anti-Semitism and of the most inhumane and ugly facet of modernity—as widespread among emancipated and secularized East European Jews, as depicted in Isaac Bashevis Singer’s short stories (see Donskis, 2003; Gilman, 1986).

Concerning the origins and essence of self-hatred, Sander L. Gilman notes:

Self-hatred results from outsiders’ acceptance of the mirage of themselves generated by their reference group—that group in society which they see as defining them—as a reality. This acceptance provides the criteria for the myth making that is the basis of any communal identity. This illusionary definition of the self, the identification with the reference group’s mirage of the Other, is contaminated by the protean variables existing within what seems to the outsider to be the homogenous group in power. This illusion contains an inherent, polar opposition. On the one hand is the liberal fantasy that anyone is welcome to share in the power of the reference group if he abides by the rules that define that group. But these rules are the very definition of the Other. The Other comprises precisely those who are not permitted to share power within the society. Thus outsiders hear an answer from their fantasy: Become like us—abandon your difference—and you may be one with us. On the other hand is the hidden qualification of the internalized reference group, the conservative curse: The more you are like me, the more I know the true value of my power, which you wish to share, and the more I am aware that you are but a shoddy counterfeit, an outsider … The privileged group, that group defined by the outsider as a reference for his or her own identity, wishes both to integrate the outsider (and remove the image of its own potential loss of power) and to distance him or her (and preserve the reification of its power through the presence of the powerless). Thus the liberal promise and the conservative curse exist on both sides of the abyss that divides the outsider from the world of privilege. (Gilman, 1986, 2)

Self-hatred is by no means confined to the Jews and African Americans. Much of present Europe’s political and public life is permeated by fear and loathing. Self-loathing accompanied by glorification of successful violence is as intense as it was by the middle of the twentieth century when Orwell described this disturbing phenomenon in his political essays. Sometimes it acquires an expression of ingratiation with a “barbarian” filled with hate for the modern world, who refuses to accept the logic of coexistence among different but otherwise peaceful lifestyles and cultures along with all of modern life. At the same time, this “barbarian” is not allowed anywhere near any power
structures and is safely tucked away into some state-financed ideological ghetto. This absence of integration into society and marginalization, often resulting in destructive repercussions and hate for any new environment, does not transform into a political or moral dilemma; instead, it becomes a “technical” problem. That is, security and terrorism, rather than a genuine dialogue or a blueprint for a viable social and moral order, becomes a concern.

The other potential answer is even more terrifying—hate for the modern world and all people who think and feel differently in the West may be accepted not as a social destructiveness but as an indelible part of another community’s specific culture. This is not only a macabre confusion of concepts but also the completely direct glorification of modern barbarianism. So what we are talking about is a modern barbarian with a Muslim’s mask, not a real Muslim. As in our world, and even in our immediate surroundings, there is no shortage of modern barbarians wearing Christian masks, who continually desecrate Christianity with their rhetoric, moralizing decisions, and actions.

We would be hard pressed to find a greater insult to demean Islam, which until the middle of the seventeenth century was rather more tolerant than Christianity, than suggesting that one of Abraham’s religions—the closest to Judaism and Christianity—is in essence irreconcilable with other religions and cultures, which is why hate toward others is one of its constituent parts. An ideology in which hate for humanity is so entrenched should simply be banned, or in the very least, its spread should be restricted.

But the search for totalitarian politics and the origins of sense amid the classical forms of religion and traditions in general would be no more than woeful nonsense. Searching for the roots of terrorism and Islamic fascism within Islam and its historical forms would be akin to drawing Bolshevism directly from the French philosophy of the Enlightenment, and Nazism from German Romantic literature and music. Very often there exists a huge gulf between idea-based impulses and culture and political actions.

The discussion here is not about one or another religion or cultural minority but about the very self-awareness of Europeans. If the act of apologizing for existing on this planet has a name, language, culture, social ritual, or self-essence, and so becomes an obstacle on the road toward the peaceful coexistence of nations, then there is undoubtedly some kind of ideologically manipulated and poisoned consciousness to deal with first. If foreign hate is tolerated, and only the familiar variety is condemned, what we have in front of us is not tolerance but simply the successful glorification of foreign violence, behind which
there hides a massive amount of scorn for others and the quiet and painstakingly disguised belief that hate and violence is allowed for barbarians but not for our civilized fellow citizens.

As mentioned, Orwell observed this mechanism for the successful glorification of violence amid pacifists, who could condemn the use of any military force in their own country, yet unreservedly consented to the violence occurring in non-Western countries that had been provoked by Western violence and power. This is comparable to the peace movement in Western Europe, whose representatives did not take offense at the Soviet rockets pointed at their very own countries but believed national defense was a universal mistake.

Hate for our own social and moral order, or for modernism itself, may be lurking here, and this disguised hate easily seeks out the modern world’s hateful groups and their ideologies and takes them to be their ideological allies or victims. How else can the anti-Semitism of the Left, aligning all Jews with the power-holding bourgeoisie of the United States and Israel, and the transformation of anti-Israeli sentiments into a step in the right direction among the academia of Western Europe and the United States become possible?

It is too obvious to need emphasis that a liberal-thinking person is not allowed to start a discourse of the defense of their own civilization from foreigners and barbarians, primarily because this is already rapidly spreading among representatives of the extreme Right in Europe and the United States, which sounds like moderate fascism. The great Buddhist, European, Islamic, Chinese, Japanese, and Persian cultures, along with the minority cultures, must all be defended by civilized humanity as a whole. Other cultures help protect us from our own modern barbarity more successfully and more often than we ourselves realize. Just as the great Arabic followers of Aristotle maintained and carried Aristotle’s philosophy into the European Middle Ages, perhaps one day classical European art and ideas will need to be preserved by the Japanese or Indians for future generations. Has history not shown us such barbarianism in Europe, which threatened all that Europe had created?

Were Le Corbusier’s architectural projects and his suggestions to remove from history all existing cities and their old towns not enough, and to remove paint from canvases that would have to be repainted—these great recommendations were enthusiastically given life by the world’s most diligent modernizers, the Bolsheviks and Maoists, were they not? Have we not had our fair share of totalitarian movements involved in the persecution and destruction of art?
This is why we should consider one of the terrible, but unfortunately likely, future scenarios. What shall we do if or when the time comes when Europe’s politicians will take it upon themselves to announce that the works of Giorgione, Leonardo, Titian, Rembrandt, and Modigliani cause deep offense among Muslims or other groups, and so, in the name of civil solidarity, respect for others, and sensitivity to a different worldview, these works will no longer be allowed to be displayed unless the naked body parts are covered? Or perhaps the works will need to be removed from museums altogether.

Let us imagine that holding these great European masters’ works to be an achievement among all of humanity and a universal trajectory of consciousness is in fact reactionary, and an art form foreign to the everyday man and the masses, a mere example of Western imperialism and the abject disrespect of other cultures. Will this denial of self not become the final and perfect testimony that there is nothing we would not gladly erase from our culture and identity in the name of spreading our ideas, justice, and peace? This calls for remembering what Daniel Bell described as “man’s self-conscious will to destroy his past and control his future” (Bell, 1976, 4).

I am sorry for existing and I am prepared to correct this injustice. I doubt whether this is any different than being sorry for the existence of others or different individuals. This logic has two sides of the coin that are the same and are relatively interchangeable. I would not like to and would not be able to live in a Europe that renounces its history and culture—with all its saints, agnostics, atheists, iconoclasts, ironics, and artists. A Europe that renounces Dante, Rembrandt, and Modigliani, in my eyes, is not worthy of further existence.

Disdain and distaste, or at best indifference, masquerading as multiculturalism is another issue. The multiculturalism of the Moorish Spain in the Middle Ages that resulted in a peaceful coexistence of Muslim, Jewish, and Castilian cultures and the politically correct and progressive multiculturalism in a liquid modern society cannot be conflated. Our liberal multiculturalism turned out to be merely a mask on the face of confusion, ambivalence, and indifference. As Bauman points out,

“Multiculturalism” is the most common answer given these days by the learned and opinion-making classes to the world’s uncertainty about the kinds of values that deserve to be cherished and cultivated, and the directions that should be pursued with rugged determination. That answer is fast becoming the canon of “political correctness”; more, it turns into an axiom that no longer needs to be spelled out … not a
knowledge itself, but the unthought, tacit assumption of all leading-to-knowledge thinking … In a nutshell, the invocation of “multiculturalism” when made by the learned classes, that contemporary incarnation of modern intellectuals, means: Sorry, we cannot bail you out from the mess you are in. Yes, there is confusion about values, about the meaning of “being human,” about the right ways of living together; but it is up to you to sort it out in your own fashion and bear the consequences in the event that you are not happy with the results. (Bauman, 2007a, 124)

Much the same happens to a modern ghetto, which is a small replica of social and cultural divisions in liquid-modern society. Where to retreat from the world that has promised you liberty, dignity, and self-fulfillment, yet turned out to be something that constantly keeps us in the middle of the river that separates the banks of tradition and modernity/rationality? When we cross the river, we inevitably pass the point of no return, which closes the way back without guaranteeing the safe arrival at our destination.

Karl Marx understood that he had no return to the premodern Jewish ghetto, which would have been tantamount to the miserable return to backwardness, traditionalism, and superstition; and so did Heinrich Heine, Wather Rathenau, and other emancipated Jews who strongly relied on the revealing, liberating, and equalizing powers of the Enlightenment project. Disraeli, on the contrary, saw the way out in the discovery, or rather invention, of someone else’s tradition that had to become a shared identity and a common antidote to that same modern project. Both Marx and Disraeli offered two ways out of the unbearable identity tensions and sociopolitical contradictions of modernity: The Marxian surmodernity was supposed to abandon the imperfect version of modernity by replacing it with a more advanced version of modernity, while Disraeli revealed tradition and antimodernism as another side of the same double-faced Janus of the modern world.

We should not wonder, then, at the resurgence of the ghetto—this time, it is self-inflicted and voluntary, rather than imposed from without. Self-confinement to the ghetto becomes a metaphor of modern existence: Émigrés, refugees, minorities, or guest workers face the dilemma of keeping a small replica of their linguistic, cultural, and sociopolitical universe (or even society and state, as in the case of Lithuanian émigrés in the United States after World War II when they lost their occupied motherland) or abolishing it for the sake of le monde and better opportunities there.
Least of all, this phenomenon deserves mockery, for it appears as a miniature of the same crossroads where Marx and Disraeli stood in the second half of the nineteenth century: Fear of, and loathing for, modernity accompanied by desire to smash this world from the face of the earth for the sake of implementation of the utopian project, or a similar attitude resulting in the project to build the wall, no matter whether real or imagined, between the hateful outer/modern world and oneself confining oneself spatially or politically. Yet we have to remember that “the real ghettos mean denial of freedom,” while “voluntary ghettos are meant to serve the cause of freedom” (Bauman, 2007a, 117).

As Bauman aptly writes on Milan Kundera who, as mentioned, does fictionally what Bauman achieves academically and theoretically, “in Milan Kundera’s succinct summary, such ‘unity of mankind’ as has been brought about by globalization means primarily that ‘there is nowhere one can escape to’” (Bauman, 2007b, 97).

This is exactly what makes the search for identity so attractive to those who tackle the predicaments of liquid modernity. Identity games and revelations open up the way out of this sort of “unity of mankind” brought about by globalization.
Chapter 6

Forgetting the Ends and Then Redoubling the Efforts

Fanaticism

Faith in a holy cause is to a considerable extent a substitute for the lost faith in ourselves.

The less justified a man is in claiming excellence for his own self; the more ready is he to claim all excellence for his nation, his religion, his race or his holy cause.

—Eric Hoffer, The True Believer

Refusal to Rely on Senses and Reason

Modernity provokes fanaticism. It incites and invites fanaticism of all shades and creeds. Modernity stands as an open invitation to everybody who wants to try out his or her faith, theory, lifestyle, moral stance, or lifetime ambition, in what used to be the concert of nations, yet now appears as the labyrinth of thought and action. The split between identity as loyalty and sound moral judgment is also a trait of the modern moral imagination. Modernity separated fact-truth and value, expertise and human intimacy, innovation and tradition, individual and society. Yet the gulf between the need for an object of loyalty as belonging and the inability to question that object critically and passionately is one of those painful dichotomies that threaten the moral integrity and reflexivity of the modern individual.

The gulf between fact and value might well be observed in what Orwell describes as our unwillingness to see and admit facts. Within
the mind of the modern true believer, a fanatical belief in one set of values and ideas is sustained by a positive refusal to admit the existence of other sets of values and ideas. A fervent belief in some abstract and distant ideal is accompanied by an equally ardent disbelief in reality. The denial of facts in favor of the hitherto unseen, unexamined, and critically unquestioned phenomenon, which was and continues to be the integral characteristic of the ideological and political fanatic’s consciousness, betrays a conflict of mutually exclusive sets of value-and-idea orientations or thought-and-action systems rather than social pathology.

The striking refusal to rely on the evidence of the senses and of reason, in the age of mass movements and dramatic social change, is a clue to the mystery of fanaticism. As Hoffer put it,

To rely on the evidence of the senses and of reason is heresy and treason. It is startling to realize how much unbelief is necessary to make belief possible. What we know as blind faith is sustained by innumerable unbeliefs. The fanatical Japanese in Brazil refused to believe for years the evidence of Japan’s defeat. The fanatical Communist refuses to believe an unfavorable report or evidence about Russia, nor will he be disillusioned by seeing with his own eyes the cruel misery inside the Soviet promised land. (Hoffer, 1963, 83)

The refusal to accept empirical evidence, similar to the way in which a selective and arbitrary historical memory of conservative and radical nationalists works, is the denial of reality in favor of the troubled imagination. Reality unable to sustain our belief or support our ideological convictions is not worth existing. Without reservations, it has to be abandoned for the sake of the new reality to come. Such an attitude requires a more or less conscious suppression of a good part of our intellectual and moral sensibilities. It goes hand in hand with what Hoffer aptly describes as “religiofication,” that is, the propensity and ability to translate practical affairs into holy causes.

Otherwise, the uncertainties and tensions inside us may run too high to remain firm and committed to a holy cause. This mental block and suppression of our moral sensitivity and common sense in favor of ideology, to which even intelligent people are subject, protects them from unbearable inner contradictions and explosive conflicts with sound reason and individual conscience, which are the contradictions and conflicts that may occur at any time. For sound reason and moral sensitivity, in the age of the clash of mutually exclusive, militant, and
rigid ideologies or of other symbolic designs of hatred and exclusion, are no longer at a premium. Instead, they become a liability.

The refusal to accept empirical evidence may throw much light on what Orwell plausibly depicts as an astonishing ability to hold two contradictory beliefs or irreconcilable attitudes at the same time. In doing so, he anticipates the phenomenon depicted as the doublethink in 1984. Bloodshed and violence are strongly rejected, but only if they occur on the adversary’s side. Violence ceases to be violence, once it is practiced by the “right side.” So does the mass killing of innocent people, if it occurs in what is supposed to be a “progressive” country.

This is not a matter of plain stereotyping, which allows us to call our adversaries single-minded and homicidal fanatics, reserving the title of patriots and heroes for those who are on our side. Instead, this is a mental and an ideological block of qualities that are vital for human connection and interaction, such as empathic openness, sympathetic understanding, and compassion. These qualities are suppressed insofar as “they,” our real or imagined ideological adversaries and political enemies, are concerned. The qualities are fully released instantly when it comes to sympathizing with human anguish and pain experienced by “us,” the side of the righteous.

Orwell suggests that even the pacifist movements are tinged with a tendency to transfer a loyalty and to improvise an identity, both expected to disguise the real attitude of some pacifists to social reality. However astonishing it may sound that real attitude of some pacifists is nothing but a secret worship of brutal force and successful violence. This allows them to condemn instantly any war casualties inflicted by Britain or America on other countries, without mentioning any single crime against humanity committed by China or Russia. A small minority of the adherents of this loosely bound ideology consists of intellectual pacifists solely motivated by hatred of Western democracy and secret admiration for totalitarianism.

A part of pacifism appears as a profound contempt for, and intense hatred of, Western liberal democracy, disguised as a humane concern for peace and human life. At the bottom of their hearts, intellectual pacifists of this cut despise Western legalist consciousness, democracy, political institutions, and the banality of life as, supposedly, unable to inspire imagination and lacking in something thrilling, romantic, and adventurous. Whence the idea that political force, if exercised by a liberal democracy, cannot in principle be efficient.

Whatever happens in a liberal democracy, in terms of its political victories or the demonstration of military might, is for the good of the Establishment, the bourgeoisie, or capitalism. Yet violence
practiced by a rival ideology or civilization, such as Communism, is efficient, for its purpose is to work out a viable alternative to much-hated Western democracy.

Orwell was not alone in his skepticism about pacifism and other vague social movements in the era of fiercely ideological and violent politics. Showing the origins and the rise of National Socialism, Raymond Aron assessed what he qualified as “the elements of the German fifth column” in the following way: “The fifth column is a typical element of the age of empires. It is recruited mainly among three sorts of men: pacifists, revolted by the material and moral cost of total war who, at the bottom of their hearts, prefer the triumph of an empire to the independent sovereignty of bellicose states; defeatists, who despair of their own country; and ideologues, who set their political faith above their patriotism and submit to the Caesar whose regime and ideology they admire” (Aron, 1959, 44).

However, such global, all-embracing, and exclusive ideologies as National Socialism and Communism functioned as secular religions. Secular ideocracies were able to manifest themselves as an Army and a Church. This means that they were able to recruit their adherents from every walk of life and sector of society, from disenchanted intellectuals, who still felt a strong need for the certainty-emanating value-and-idea systems, to commoners infatuated with modern apocalyptic theories promising the beginning of a new history (see Aron, 1968).

Yet we should not overgeneralize the modern peace movements by portraying them all as motivated by hatred of the West, accompanied by secret admiration for ideological and political adversaries of Western democracies or by latent adoration of brutal political force and violence. Instead, what Orwell achieved with the stroke of genius was his strong emphasis placed on spontaneously improvised attachments, transferred and transposed loyalties, and fabricated identities, all conceived as part of the hidden logic of hatred. Orwell’s devastating criticism of ideological forgeries implies that seldom is hatred straight and obvious; instead, it prefers to walk in disguise. What results from this hidden logic and metaphysics of hatred is that hatred masquerades as love and compassion: Love of peace and humanity or compassion for the weak, underprivileged, oppressed, and dispossessed.

One more lesson of great value that we learn from Orwell is that disenchanted, isolated, and alienated intellectuals succumb to those transferable and dislocated identities much easier and much more frequently than common people. In the age of mass movements, independent, skeptical, and critical thought becomes an exclusive property of independent and dissenting people whom Harold Bloom once
called the crucial minority. Since intellectuals, by virtue of being at odds with mundane forms of earthly attachment, are able to translate their needs for roots and home into ideological and political fidelity to imagined communities of virtue, they eventually lose their ability to be at peace with common sense. Common sense is a valuable quality of common people, who, because of their natural skepticism to things disconnected from mundane reality, are much more immune to fanatism and hatred.

This loosely bound and flexible morality comes into being along with the ideological blocks of sensitivity. Since our ideological commitment may be jeopardized because other flesh-and-blood human beings suffer bloodshed, torture, or other calamities, the only attitude at hand that can prevent us from inflicting pain or suffering on our fellow human beings is the denial of the facts of their suffering. Such a refusal to believe in politically inconvenient or otherwise harmful facts can be successfully combined with a propensity to deprive our enemies of their human traits.

This mechanism of self-defense, or self-inflicted moral blindness, betrays the compensatory and defensive nature of hatred. Hatred appears as the outcome of our self-contempt and suppressed sense of guilt. The same might be said about rage, which is an inevitable consequence of the suppressed sense of shame (see Scheff and Retzinger, 1991). We can now understand why highly qualified scholars and sophisticated intellectuals can deny the Holocaust. And why anti-Semitism can be so intense and strong in Central and East European countries where no Jews are left yet where the Holocaust occurred in conjunction with a strong support of local governments or an active participation of local population (see Donskis, 2002).

Orwell tells a most telling wartime story about how the liberal *News Chronicle* published, as an example of shocking barbarity, photographs of Russians hanged by the Germans. A couple of years later, they published, with warm approval, almost the same photographs with the only difference being that Germans had been hanged by the Russians. Another example was the *Star*, which published with approval photographs of nearly naked female collaborationists being baited by the Paris mob after the occupation. Orwell was deeply disturbed by the astonishing similarity of these photographs to the Nazi photographs of Jews being baited by the Berlin mob. What had been initially perceived as an example of shocking barbarity, miraculously turned into a virtuous thing, only because it had been done in the right cause.

History as a continuous record of heroic deeds is manufactured in much the same manner. Modern intellectuals deplore the Inquisition,
Sir Francis Drake skinning Spanish prisoners alive, the Reign of Terror, the heroes of the Indian Mutiny blowing Indians out of the guns, or Cromwell’s soldiers slashing Irish women’s faces with razors, without giving much consideration to atrocities in Russia, China, Spain, Mexico, or Hungary (see Orwell, 1970, 165–66).

A selective perception of history and politics is related to a widespread tendency to employ a double standard when dealing with “our” and “their” roles in history, and to an astonishing ability to decide whether some historical events happened, resting such a decision solely on political predilection. History turns into an irresponsible play of imagination of partisan social actors, who see in history what they want to see and who build, in their imagination, the monuments to their imagined communities of truth and virtue.

The question remains, what is the origin of fanaticism? Orwell, among other perceptive writers, pointed to the general uncertainty and failure to understand what is really happening in the world as an inciting invitation, extended to the most confused, scared, or frustrated modern individuals, to cling to lunatic beliefs. With sound reason, then, George Santayana, as mentioned, described a fanatic as “a man who redoubles his efforts when he has forgotten his ends.”

All major social philosophers and sociologists today acknowledge that modernity destroyed the old certainties without providing any new workable, normative, prescriptive, and imperative designs of selfhood. To create such a design of selfhood for ourselves, without any assistance from an observable and unshakably reliable source, such as solid cultural tradition or enduring and change-immune faith, is unbearably difficult, if not impossible, for those who are not at home in a world of modern self-making and self-discovery.

Hence, the desperate need for beliefs, theories, or practices that promise to fight uncertainty and revive the neglected symbols and forgotten values. Hatred comes to such a disturbed soul as a promise of the restoration of certainty. The modern world, too complex and threatening to figure out what kind of values has to be taken seriously and what kind of ideas has to be credited, all of a sudden becomes transparent and clear. The image of an enemy restores our faith in ourselves as capable of supporting the right cause, the holy cause, the righteous and virtuous as against the vicious, spoiled, and incomprehensible. An enemy is what we can place beyond our reach and understanding. In so doing, we identify what is beyond our reach and understanding with what is uncertain inside us.

At this point, hatred always comes from our self-contempt and self-hatred. Our enemies are nothing other than what we hate in ourselves.
the most, and what we externalize, projecting it onto the most familiar, though the least comprehensible, idiom of otherness. As Hoffer notes, “Are the frustrated more easily indoctrinated than the non-frustrated? Are they more credulous? Pascal was of the opinion that ‘one was well-minded to understand holy writ when one hated oneself.’ There is apparently some connection between dissatisfaction with oneself and a proneness to credulity. The urge to escape our real self is also an urge to escape the rational and the obvious. The refusal to see ourselves as we are develops a distaste for facts and cold logic” (Hoffer, 1963, 86).

Hoffer accurately defines the term “frustrated,” which is not used in his book as a clinical term. He mentions that “it denotes here people who, for one reason or another, feel that their lives are spoiled or wasted” (ibid., 179). Our willingness to sink our identity in some mysterious bodies of ideas or of “the spirit of the people” may be related to a considerable extent to our dissatisfactions, disappointments, personal failures, or overall alienation from modern society and culture. Yet the question remains, why can people so easily transpose or reverse their attitudes and beliefs? For instance, how could an ardent patriot of Great Britain suddenly slip into Anglophobia or Anglophilia? Why and how can a sober-minded and skeptical intellectual turn into a fanatic adherent to other countries, societies, cultures, religions, ideologies, and political institutions?

According to Orwell, British writers who might best exemplify the ability to transform ourselves from Anglophobes into violently pro-British people, were F. A. Voigt, Malcolm Muggeridge, Evelyn Waugh, Hugh Kingsmill, and, to some extent, T. S. Eliot and Wyndham Lewis (Orwell, 1970, 169). An intellectual who turned out to have suppressed his democratic sensibilities in favor of an opposing worldview was G. K. Chesterton, described by Orwell as a writer of considerable talent who chose to suppress his intellectual honesty and sensibilities in the cause of Roman Catholic propaganda. This led Chesterton so far as to glorify every walk of life in largely idealized, if not imagined, France, and to admire Mussolini’s Italy, a variety of transferred loyalty, which Orwell describes as political Catholicism. A true hater of jingoism and imperialism, and a true friend of democracy in home politics, Chesterton failed to find a word against imperialism and the conquest of colored races practiced by the Italians or French. Nor did he ever mention that Mussolini had destroyed freedom and democracy in Italy (ibid., 160–61).

Chesterton’s case is instructive when we think of transferred loyalties and fabricated identities, for it is a basic characteristic of the
modern troubled identity. The troubled moral identity appears unable to reconcile the conflicting sets of values and ideas and incapable of a truly workable universalistic pattern of worldview. To be a political liberal and a religious conservative at the same time appears extremely difficult, if not impossible. How to reconcile being a dedicated patriot of Britain and a devout Roman Catholic? Or how about being an East/Central European nationalist and a skeptical liberal cosmopolitan? How to combine fidelity and doubt, value and truth, imagination and reality? Organized religion is unable to show the way out, since religion itself increasingly becomes politically exploited or otherwise abused by modern barbarians. At best, it is politically neutral, even marginal, in the modern world.

We have to admit that ethical universalism, or secular humanism, is far from a universally appealing answer. Ethical universalism, so potent a form of social and cultural criticism, is placed in jeopardy or put aside in time of trouble or in an era of ideological clashes. Within the framework of the modern troubled imagination, nothing is durable and nothing is lasting. Ethical universalism may come, to a weak and disturbed modern individual, as much too big a challenge and as too great a disappointment, for it offers neither prescriptive designs of thought and action nor the way out of a world of unbearable tensions, ambiguities, and uncertainties. Instead, ethical universalism takes every human individual as, ultimately, the only agent of reason and conscience capable of moral choice. Sadly, ethical universalism appears as too weak a basis for decisive action and for a workable identity, no matter whether ethnic, political, or cultural identity, which, as we have seen, may be interchangeable.

**Dogmatism and the Ambiguous Person**

A society or a culture in crisis inevitably reveals itself through individual consciousness in crisis. Vytautas Kavolis termed one such manifestation of culture in crisis as the “ambiguous person.” Kavolis notes that several human beings frequently reveal, for themselves, their psychic ambiguity, although they become absolutely clear and unambiguous in forming or influencing behavior and stances of other human beings. In Kavolis’s opinion, the ambiguous person especially longs for the intense experiences. This kind of striving for intensity, which is psychoanalytically identifiable and exploitable, jeopardizes the personality of the ambiguous person and the entire modern consciousness and culture as well.

According to Kavolis,
Where the striving for intensity prevails, the authoritarian style in both thinking and decision-making predominates quite often, even when the conscious content of the thought is libertarian: Let us take, for example, Marcuse or the Living Theater. The intensity seekers quite naturally tend to think in polarities contrasting “truth” to “error,” or “virtue” to “meanness,” instead of searching for some missing links and nuances. Those nuances represent nothing other but the psychical ambiguity in their character, which they consider unbearable and try to repress with arbitrary, though “real,” moments of intensity. This is why they, even in demanding the freedom of choice, expect others to choose their way to be free or even their way to conceive freedom. (Kavolis, 1993, 126; translation mine)

A possible implication of Kavolis’s thought is that because ambiguous persons are incapable of analytically grasping and critically questioning themselves, they eventually misrepresent social reality, projecting on it those painful elements of their personality and experience that are too hard for them to understand or to eliminate from themselves. In a way, Kavolis’s concept of the ambiguous person is reminiscent of what Theodor Adorno, Max Horkheimer, and Erich Fromm described as the authoritarian personality. The stress on dogmatism and the dogmatic demands to the world is striking here as both the ambiguous person and the authoritarian personality perfectly exemplify a black-and-white grasp of reality devoid of any nuances and undertones. As Kavolis notes,

The dogmatic demands to the world spring from the inner ambiguity of personality. We can be preserved by the vigorous terms from our inner decomposition. Psychoanalysts had identified this mechanism in the earlier, still more or less romantic, Russian revolutionaries. Dogmatism is the mechanical stabilization of the ambiguous person rather than the organic stabilization that springs from the depth of our personality. Yet this kind of protective armor, deep inside the ambiguous person, sooner or later comes to crack down and destroy either ambiguous persons themselves or others. (ibid.; translation mine)

Kavolis describes dogmatism as that which springs from cognitive dissonance. Therefore, if “the dogmatic demands to the world spring from the inner ambiguity of personality,” dogmatism itself is an illusion of the clear standpoint and transparent thought. Our striving for intensity, in our milieu, betrays our inability to critically analyze ourselves or human reality as it is, before reality’s enchantment with
ideological magic, ideocratic formulas of order, carnal and psychic experiments, and the like.

Dogmatic and ambiguous persons are incapable of critically analyzing at all. They are only capable of creating gloomy prophesies or of symbolically excommunicating those who are considered a threat to the body social and its nearly mystical coherence. When the quest for enemies comes to replace critical analysis, their troubled imagination easily provides a group-target, whence, a strong need for the conspiracy theory. Combined with a self-inflicted moral blindness, block of moral sensitivity, refusal to accept reality, and distaste for cold logic and facts, the conspiratorial view of the world provides the necessary type of reasoning and amoral logic in finding an indispensable group-target.

If we refuse to believe in the infallibility of the Party or the Leader, or in the holiness of our cause, we will always link infamous things or violent politics practiced on our side to an imagined group-target. Such a group-target is a negative double of the imagined community of virtue and truth with which we identify. The imagined community we love can be sustained in our imagination only by projecting its awful political practices and disgraceful manipulations onto the imagined community we hate. This is why the conspiracy theory will survive any political regime, moral culture, or type of government. Whatever its guise and whatever its origin in a given society, the conspiracy theory is a ready-made answer to all politically or morally inconvenient questions. Indeed, the fanatic without the conspiracy theory at hand is an oxymoron and so is the dogmatic and ambiguous person without such a theory.

Orwell’s notes on the anatomy of collective hatred make several crucial points. The designs of ideological faith, resentment, and hatred are interchangeable. Political and ideological loyalties are transferable. Identities are movable, changeable, and renewable. All of these things become possible because of manipulative politics, cynical brainwashing, or sinister propaganda. We could formulate this exactly the other way around: Manipulations, brainwashing, and propaganda can become truly efficient only in the modern era of transferred loyalties and fabricated identities. They would never have worked, say, in medieval or Renaissance Europe.

Following José Ortega y Gasset, Michel Serres, and Beata Frydryczak, Zygmunt Bauman analyzed Don Juan as a hero of modernity and as a protagonist of the “here and now” performance of life, rather than as a collector of broken hearts or beautiful women. A person of the fleeting moment and intensity, Don Juan’s collectibles were sensations and excitements, instead of portraits or other valuable acquisitions
signifying an active and important role in the Vanity Fair. “And sensations are by their nature as frail and short-lived, as volatile as the situations that triggered them. The strategy of carpe diem is a response to a world emptied of values pretending to be lasting” (Bauman, 2004, 53). In Kavolis’s perspective, Don Juan with his craving for intensity and mobile identity made up by renewable moments of excitement would undoubtedly fall into the category of the ambiguous person.

Of Don Juan as an architect and protagonist of modern strategy of life with all its evasiveness, versatility, volatility, and unpredictability, Bauman writes, “Don Juan (as portrayed by Molière, Mozart or Kierkegaard) may be named as an inventor and pioneer of that strategy. By Molière’s Don Juan’s own admission, the delight of love consists in incessant change. The secret of Mozart’s Don Giovanni’s conquests, in Kierkegaard’s opinion, was his knack for finishing quickly and starting from a new beginning; Don Giovanni was in a state of perpetual self-creation” (ibid., 52).

Contrary to Don Juan with his fixation of self-creation, incessant change, and intensity, Don Quixote attempts to arrest social and cultural change and to seize the beautiful moment of life. Whereas Don Juan—by pushing his own evasiveness, versatility, volatility, and predictability to the limit—chooses to deal with evasive, versatile, volatile, and unpredictable reality as a good player who decides to beat his rival at his own game, Don Quixote endeavors to restore the human being’s self-worth along with the worth of the world as a whole. Whereas Don Juan acts like a perfect modern, Don Quixote reveals himself as a tragic conservative. “Don Quixote is a figure who belongs to a transitional period in which the values and ideas of a previous age had stopped operating, but in which new ones, which could be deemed reliable by its inhabitants, had yet to appear. No surprise, then, that Don Quixote does not recognize his surroundings” (Donskis, 2008, 46).

Don Juan anticipates such great challengers of social reality as Marquis de Sade who takes the delight of freedom by consciously breaking taboos, opposing conventions, and preferring practices over abstract ends or theoretical purposes. Yet a possible aspect of fanaticism exists in Don Juan—the fanaticism of incessant change as opposed to the canon, whatever its guise. This variety of modernizing and secular fanaticism would take no mercy on the past and would gladly smash it from the face of the earth. Intensity and ambiguity allow room for dogmatism speaking up in favor of ascetic and revolutionary ideals or at least a deliberate desecration of religious symbols and instruments of power, as in Marquis de Sade’s plays.
Yet Don Quixote, if pushed to the limit of his inner logic, would reveal another aspect of fanaticism by abandoning today in favor of yesterday, or abandoning his reason and senses in favor of his faith and imagination. Fanaticism deeply permeated with the denial of the canon, and its negative double, the fanaticism of the canon irreconcilable to any sort of modern ideological secularism and relativism, are two faces of the same modern Janus. The fanaticism of change and that of law and order call for one another as two sides of the same modern coin. Don Juan embodies liberty and appears as the protagonist of the liberal imagination pushed to the limit, whereas Don Quixote, the errant knight of the conservative imagination, speaks up for a distant and noble-spirited epoch much preferable to his time.

One thing makes Don Juan and Don Quixote morally irreconcilable and mutually exclusive characters, though. If Don Juan may well be described as an embodiment of the frailty of human bonds and of the separation of emotional and physical intimacy, Don Quixote appears as a powerful symbol of the powers of association, even if they are gone astray, and of faithfulness and loyalty as a friend. Friendship as a dialogue of the soul and as a joint devotion anticipates the Romantic notion of friendship and leaves us hope that an antidote against instrumental and manipulative human exchanges, this curse of modernity, can be worked out. Therefore, it depends on which faculty of the soul or aspect of personality we push to the limit.

**Masks of Modern Fanaticism**

Those whom we treat as fanatics tend to become the heroes for those whom we hate or despise and vice versa. This is what I would describe as a vicious circle of mutual demonization, that is, an extremely negative, black-and-white portrayal of the foe accompanied by the will-to-misunderstand. The affinity between the fanatic and the hero is striking. Both act beyond reach of any theory or common sense; the absence of the fear of death becomes a mystery for their adversaries and enemies. Fanaticism does not have to be necessarily linked to war cries, battles, skirmishes, sonorous phrases, and winged expressions. It can sound quite polite, even timid and apologetic. What is behind fanaticism is the refusal to take reality as it is. For a fanatic, reality is not authentic and reliable until it is set up or orchestrated in accordance with the blueprint for the only social and moral order possible in the universe. Order should be held prior and superior to any spontaneity or unpredictability of human life.
How can we understand modern fanaticism if we overlook the characters from three of Ingmar Bergman’s films, whose surnames are all Vergérus? Take the Nazi scientist Hans Vergérus from The Serpent’s Egg who conducted experiments on people. Or the minister of health, Dr. Vergérus from Magician, who failed to believe in the mystery of individualism and the inherent value of individuality in general, a modern bureaucrat wanting to control the whole world. Lastly, we can also remember the Lutheran bishop Edvard Vergérus from Fanny and Alexander, who would violently abuse a child and then offer them his hand to kiss as thanks for the beating.

The fanatic travels across history changing his masks and guises, but he never betrays, forgets, or else abandons his ultimate end and obsession to impose his concept and practice of order on the disorderly world gone astray and to fight human spontaneity and unpredictability in all their manifestations. Through Bergman’s subtle portrayal of the Vergérus triplet we reveal one more face of modern fanaticism—the modernizing fanaticism that speaks up in favor of law, order, stability, predictability, and rationality, as opposed to the archaizing fanaticism as a blind faith in mystical collectivities or ancient rituals and practices.

Vergérus the scientist who, having poisoned himself only to escape arrest and interrogation, observes his own agony in the mirror to know the way he passes away. Vergérus the bureaucrat calmly but fiercely refuses to believe in what he takes as backwardness, irrationality, and superstition—they both are nearly perfect caricatures of the Enlightenment with its belief in logic, reason, rationality, order, and science. We are inclined to believe that fanaticism is a child of the Middle Ages, an attitude that has a grain of truth; yet it completely overlooks the origins of modern fanaticism. Modern fanaticism is not as much about the (con)fusion of sacral and secular power, which was the case with the amalgam of Roman political absolutism and medieval Christian religious absolutism, as it is about the undisputable domination of a (pseudo)scientific theory, a political doctrine, a detached principle, or a blueprint for a social and moral order.

Modern fanaticism originates as a belief that an all-embracing theory or doctrine could be institutionalized by a sociopolitical regime, which, for its part, would perfectly control societal life and the relationship between the individual and community. Not a single aspect of reality escapes from control. No aspect of human life remains untouched or goes unnoticed. At this point, modern fanaticism represents an amalgam of archaic ends and modern means. It sounds archaic in theory, yet it appears strikingly modern in practice. We should not be deceived by Islamists or Christian fundamentalists who seek to
revive the primacy of faith over secular practices, for they would never abandon their luxury, comfort of life, high-tech, and the like.

What they want to establish is rather one single doctrine or ideology, which would subordinate or abolish all other doctrines, ideologies, theories, or beliefs without touching the practical, instrumental, and technological aspects of life. This sort of fanaticism is not about the destruction of modern reality; instead, it is about the struggle over its concept and interpretation or the appropriation of modernity that would allow “yet another modernity,” that is, its alternative version.

As an antimodern, or countermodern, obsession, fanaticism is inseparable from antimodernist movements, first and foremost from Fascism and National Socialism; yet it can be characteristic of totalitarianism that speaks up for the Enlightenment project and even appropriates its symbols, language, and paraphernalia. The Communist movement and the former Soviet Union in particular may best serve as an example of how a dark and deeply misanthropic ideology can appropriate, successfully incorporate, and exploit the political language of the great Enlightenment project. To lightly and safely assume that the Soviet regime, totalitarian and criminal in every detail, was a legitimate heir to the Enlightenment and the French Revolution would be unpardonable naïveté; yet this dislocation of ideological and political identity has taken place.

Bergman’s films warn us about instrumental rationality as modern evil totally disconnected from humanist belief in the uniqueness and unchangeability of the individual. In doing so, he destroys our naïve assumption that fanaticism has necessarily to be profoundly religious and to wear the Cross, David Star, or other religious symbols. In a way, Vergérus the bishop is the most predictable and recognizable character from the gallery of Bergman’s fanatics and violent individuals—he has more to do with Bergman’s attitude to the Church and clergy and with Bergman’s biographical details.

Ernest Gellner analyzed the two main possibilities of societal development in the modern world, namely, the possibility of the ideologically secular (“routinized” in the sense of Max Weber’s sociology of religion), liberal, heterogeneous society, that is, civil society, and that of the ُُّمُّمَّا, the Arabic word for the Muslim Oikoumenē (Lewis, 1988, 32–38), rather than for a certain ideocracy. Gellner, most probably, deliberately takes the ُُّمُّمَّا as a symbolic reference to the triumph of ideocratic community over civil society in the Muslim world. Civil society emerges as a failed ُُّمُّمَّا, and vice versa. ُُّمُّمَّا, once it succeeded in fulfilling itself, leaves room neither for the secularization of consciousness and culture nor for civil society.
In distinguishing between liberal and ideocratic societies, Gellner follows Raymond Aron who had coined the term “ideocracy.”

In brief, civil society and *Umma* represent two mutually exclusive, in principle, incompatible tendencies of consciousness, symbolic embodiments of the idiom of social order, and symbolic designs of a given society/civilization that provide the frames of meaning. Subsequently, they become a watershed between the West and Islamic civilization, although Gellner also applies the concept of the *Umma* to analyze the numerous attempts at establishing ideocracy in the West.

The *Umma*—as a phenomenon of consciousness and as a basis for a moral order—allows no room for the principle of tolerance, since the *Umma* manifests itself as the model of ideological thinking. If a successful *Umma* prevails over the beginnings of civil society (that is, once an ideocracy is established), some implicit elements of tolerance may appear only insofar as religious heresy or philosophical interpretation contributes to the proliferation of sects or small-scale religious communities or philosophical schools. This is not to say that the *Umma* exclusively represents Islamic civilization—although nowhere else but in Islam does the *Umma* come to uncover its secularization-resistant nature.

With sound reason, then, Gellner coined such terms as “Calvinist *Umma*” or “Marxist *Umma*,” stressing the universal character of ideocracy, no matter whether religious or secular. Incidentally, Gellner described Marxism as the Calvinism of the industrial world. We have no reason to reserve the concept of the community of the righteous exclusively for the Muslim world, for we have seen myriads of fanatics of all shades in European history. Fanaticism is a phenomenon of the modern troubled identity and as such is not attached once and for all to any specific religion or culture. The encounter of tradition and modernity or, as Dumont would say, of the hierarchical foundations of a given society and its modernization, is more likely to incite and invite fanaticism.

On the other side, the excesses and new ideological or political cults of modernity can also provoke the outbreak of aggressively defensive fanaticism. Once this happens, fanaticism starts wearing the mask of the defender of an abused tradition. It has its power to appeal to many disturbed souls: Whenever people feel that their safety and security is threatened by swift social and economic change, they assume the role of the defenders of faith, tradition, and culture. If this is the case, the market is ready for strong and militant identities.

One danger exists here, though. As mentioned, the dividing line between heroes and single-minded fanatics appears quite thin: It all
depends which side the individuals in question are on. Those who
fight for us qualify for the gallery of heroes. Their death does not
belong to them, for it becomes a national property and an object of
national pride and reverence. If they sacrificed their lives for a moth-
erland, they immortalized their names and made those who stay alive
feel gratitude, excitement, and fascination—all these feelings are expe-
rienced during special days when a nation mourns or celebrates its
historical dates. Yet those who did the same for our foe fall into the
category of fanatics. A similar difference exists between fearless free-
dom fighters and cold-blooded killers.

That was a rhetorical issue. Yet something deeper lurks here. Like
“the struggle between good and evil,” “fanaticism” often signifies our
inability to deal with social reality and its challenges to our cognitive
powers otherwise than through ready-made, banal, and worn-out con-
cepts or catchwords like “brainwash,” “homicidal fanaticism,” and so
on. The use of this term often betrays our impotence to comprehend
and describe the most vulnerable, fragile, dramatic, and tragic aspects
of modern existence. Every single case of what we call “fanaticism”
contains a human tragedy, a failure to live his or her life with dignity.
A sense of a hopelessly wasted life calls for the final act of revenge for
it, and death becomes that finishing stroke that allows the disturbed
individuals to experience their dignity in the world that deprived them
of it. As Bauman notes, “A dignified death appears to them to be the
last chance of a dignity which has already been denied to them in life.
Such people are pliable stuff in the hands of wily and crafty, ruthless
and heartless manipulators. It is from their ranks that present-day ter-
rorists are recruited. They are execrably distorted mutants of the old-
style martyrs on whom equally deformed simulacra of old-style heroes
have been grafted” (Bauman, 2006, 46).

Bauman relates this transformation of the sense of powerlessness
and humiliation into that of pride and dignity to a horrifying mixture
of opposing cultural logics. Martyrs who can give their lives for faith
and for the salvation of their souls never think in terms of the symme-
try of pain and casualties. They do not have a task to kill their adver-
saries. All they want is preservation of something larger than their
lives and personalities. Heroes, on the contrary, always calculate gains
and losses. They do not give their lives just for the sake of beau geste:
Instead, they risk their lives in the hope of the rationally planned and
calculated victory. Even when they have to sacrifice their lives, they
can count on their posthumous glory. A truly awful and sinister phe-
nomenon results from the fusion of these two cultural logics—one
premodern in its spirit and another profoundly modern. “However
virtuous martyrs and heroes could claim to be ... once their qualities are mixed together they produce an incongruous and truly satanic combination” (ibid., 47). Therefore, what we call a terrorist or a suicide bomber nowadays is nothing other than the tragic outcome of such a fusion.

Is There a Cure for Fanaticism?

I started thinking about fanaticism in the late 1980s, when Lithuania was on its way to independence as the first breakaway republic of the former Soviet Union. I saw sincere hardliners and genuine fanatics of the Soviet regime who did not understand that even the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in Moscow ceased taking Communism seriously and gave up the last hope to save the empire in its previous shape. Some of these people, who were predominantly high-ranking officials of the Communist Party, were raised in orphan asylums. Although they spoke their native Lithuanian, they were completely out of touch with reality and, subsequently, perceived the national liberation movement as high treason of their fellow Communists and as a criminal revolt instigated by a bunch of bourgeois reactionaries.

Their detachment from reality and their refusal to accept it was astonishing. These people orchestrated the bloodshed on January 13, 1991, in Vilnius, which claimed the lives of thirteen people killed by Soviet troops. When Lithuania caught some of these perpetrators, brought them to justice, and gave them life sentences, they were still repeating the same old rubbish about a conspiracy against the Soviet Union. Therefore, a failure to believe one’s senses and to accept reality, which Orwell and Hoffer described so lucidly and convincingly, is not a fantasy nor is it their exaggeration.

I returned to the topic of fanaticism during the 2007 Gothenburg Book Fair when I attended two discussion sessions with the Israeli author Amos Oz. He was presenting his collection of essays, translated into Swedish, titled How to Cure a Fanatic. This is why all that he spoke of hinged on the axis of this topic. It should be mentioned that just as is the case with many other well-known Israeli politicians and intellectuals, Oz is of Litvak origin. Before leaving for Palestine before World War II, his father lived and studied literature in Vilnius.

Oz spoke only briefly about himself; yet he mentioned several interesting details that clarified why he had chosen to talk about fanaticism and why it was so important to him personally. Oz was born in 1939 in the then British-controlled Palestine. He was brought up in the
spirit of the Zionist Right, and from childhood he had been certain that Jews were inarguably 150 percent correct, while the rest of the world was 150 percent wrong. This belief held by the young Amos Klausner (his first surname) or, in his own words, his early fanaticism, was brought down by two people. The first was a sergeant of the British police force who then was seen as the enemy and who befriended the boy and started teaching him English. In return, the sergeant could thank the young Amos for teaching him Hebrew.

Friendship with the enemy turned into one of the great lessons of life; one’s enemy does not necessarily bear horns and fangs. The enemy can also be a pleasant person, whose personality and life cannot be blamed for his falling into the dark depths of those circumstances. A particular type of life may well befall someone due to matters out of their control, such as state policy, ideology or a chance happening, like being conscripted or being born at an inopportune time. It suffices to be of conscriptable age, then be forced to join the army, and, finally, to be drawn into in a war to become the enemy of a totally unknown and otherwise innocent nation.

The second of life’s lessons to help Oz shake his typically childlike black-and-white understanding of the world, as well as his early inclinations toward fanaticism, was the hopeless love of a twelve-year-old boy for an eighteen-year-old girl. According to Oz, it was through spending time with this girl that he demystified the boyish image of a woman as a strange and inexplicable being. Oz discarded the illusion that fanaticism is a concept monopolized by some distinct groups that we only get to see on our television screens. According to him, it is rather a virus that each of us carries within. Fanaticism, or an obsession over cleanliness and order, is commonplace; yet luckily its effects are not harmful. Simply put, there is safe fanaticism, but once it is transposed into politics, religion, or international relations, fanaticism becomes a most destructive and terrible force.

I did not agree with everything Oz had to say. It is true that fanaticism and hate are more closely linked to a certain social viewpoint or perception of reality and seeing the world in a strict black-white light, but not with traumatized and morally defective individuals—the latter are not necessarily always fanatical. A fanatic may smile, and be a mild-mannered longtime friend; nevertheless, at that fateful moment, when one must choose the future status of one’s soul and the enemy’s body (in the fanatic’s eyes, the enemy has no soul to speak of), they decide to shoot or to blast you to pieces. The dilemma between duty and an individual conscience simply does not exist in
the soul of a fanatic—the absolution of duty, or the ethics of one’s divine mission, create the dangerous dispersion field of fanaticism.

It is true that the potential for fanaticism lies within the psyche and mind of each human being. As is said in the old Jewish saying (which Oz undoubtedly knows, as he propagates the same argument, only using different terms), within us there lurks both a peace-loving creature and a blood-thirsty beast—the only difference being that some of us feed the peaceful creature, while others nourish the beast. At the same time, it should be added that fanaticism thrives under the conditions of fusion of political absolutism and ideological monism. In the space where everything exists, including all the most intimate human relations and the doctrine explaining all aspects of the human soul, the environment is not only conducive to fanaticism but is, in essence, ideal. One is readily introduced to that which they are obliged to discover in their soul.

Some time ago, prior to undergoing reforms, Christianity experienced a similar phenomenon, having perfectly grasped its position in the political power arena and having turned it to its advantage. Today, this is repeating in a large part of the Islamic world, where the dramatic collision with modernity (only in accepting modernity in the technological sense, ignoring its political or moral obligation forms) is instrumental in giving rise to Islamism. Truth be told, a similar combination created both Bolshevism and Nazism, is just that the first fooled the world with its so-called loyalty to the ideals of the Enlightenment and the French Revolution, while the second similarly rejected canon and tradition and instead plunged into the mysticism of a secular race and biological vitalism. Doctrines of ideocracy, that is, all-encompassing doctrines that endeavor to totally penetrate and control all of humanity, or conditionally monolithic and immovable ideological or religious monism, literally scream for political absolutism or a theocratic regime, which is not all that different to a secular dictatorship.

Under such conditions, it becomes all the more unlikely, yet also wonderful, to witness individuals that have not succumbed to fanaticism. Hate toward infidels or simply other people in this environment is not only left unrestricted, quite the opposite, it is encouraged by the whole educational and political system. This type of fanaticism is the product of organized hate and, in many cases, is literally contrived in people’s minds and souls. Yet no shortage of fanaticism exists both in democratic and secular societies, from the Stalinists and Communists still existing in Western Europe, believing that the real Communism is yet to be experienced, to the fanatics supporting animal rights, ecologism, or stand-alone groups or subcultures (most likely thereby disguising
their misanthropy or hate for the modern world), who are inclined to turn the whole world onto their way of thinking.

But we should agree that where a secular society and realistic political pluralism exists, fanaticism is at least thus far quite readily countered by the principle of rejection of one or another obligatory doctrine or ideology. Therefore, fanatics in the West are, luckily, considerably more humorous than threatening. However, this is no reason to drop our guard. The expression of symptoms of a secular ideocracy and hate toward modernity is in such ample supply that independent believers in the West are no longer from the Left, rather, they are conservative people—and not the opposition. Meanwhile, in a mainstream situation, Leftism argues in favor of a strange inversion, but this is an altogether different and broad-ranging topic.

Having wittily described himself as a passionate Jerusalemite and as a recovered fanatic, Oz goes on redefining the term “compromise,” the word that has a bad reputation in the eyes of young idealists for whom compromise means just another word for lack of principle and sheer opportunism. For Oz, compromise means life. The opposite of compromise is not idealism or devolution but fanaticism and death (see Oz, 2006, 8). The uncompromising self-righteousness has been the calamity of humankind throughout its history. By no means is the Israeli-Palestinian conflict a war of religions, cultures, or traditions, although the fanatics on both sides would be happy to present it exactly in this light; instead, it is rather a real estate dispute and a painful divorce. September 11 was not about whether America was good or bad or whether globalization had to be stopped. All those conflicts occur between fanatics who believe that the end justifies the means and pragmatic and commonsense people who assert that life is an end not a means (see ibid., 40–41).

Oz’s notion, which I implicitly agree with, proclaims that the best criterion for determining fanaticism is the presence or absence of laughter and humor in the life of a given individual, group, or society. Those who will not or cannot laugh at themselves pose a threat to the world; those who only manage to brutally ridicule the weaker element, irrespective of whether this may be another person or another group, yield less force or influence than ourselves. Fanaticism is best treated by the ability to laugh at oneself, teaching us forgiveness and reminding us just how weak and imperfect man is. Oz is completely correct, but there are some things I would add. The key is learning how to forgive, but not at the expense of defending one’s principles and ideas—having no expectations or demands from an individual is akin to their dismissal and disrespect. In the end, there is good humor
and cruel humor—the good is directed at oneself and the tragicomic nature of man and is a testament of sympathy for the human race. Yet cruel humor caricatures the rest of the world or one’s enemy and is just another part of the same expression of hate (and so, fanaticism).

The revealing powers of humor, along with the ability to imagine the other and the capacity to grasp another individual’s connectedness to humanity—the peninsular quality of the human being, instead of his or her being an island in the sense of John Donne, in Oz’s parlance—become the most powerful antidote against fanaticism (see ibid., 69–71). In offering his view on fanaticism, Oz redefines the phenomenon of treason, which, in his opinion, is not necessarily opposed to love. It is one of love’s options, according to him.

Fanatics do not change. They are incapable of change, though change is exactly what they expect and require from others. In the eyes of a fanatic, “traitors” are people who change their attitude to what was a common cause or an abject of a joint dedication or adopt a perspective different from that with which they lived for some time. “Traitor, I think, is the one who changes in the eyes of those who cannot change and would not change and hate change and cannot conceive of change, except that they always want to change you” (ibid., 49). Fanatics are sarcastic; yet they lack a sense of humor. Humor is a phenomenon of relativism par excellence. Our ability to see ourselves in the way in which other people see us is inseparable from relativism—that same blissful relativism that Oz regards as a potent alternative to the moral self-righteousness and absolutism of fanatics. Oz’s existential, political, and moral experience as a former Jerusalemite and a “recovered fanatic” is, perhaps, best summed up in his novel Panther in the Basement (1995).

Is there a cure for fanaticism? As long as the sense of humor and emphatic powers remain a significant part of our modern sensitivity, the answer is yes. Amos Oz’s lessons prove this better than anything else. The ability not to take ourselves too seriously and not to regard our society and culture as the very center of the universe should become part of liberal education, along with the cultivation of a culture of curiosity and humor.
Chapter 7

Nowhere at Home

The result ... is a twofold one: one is a skepticism and cynicism towards everything which is said or printed, while the other is a childish belief in anything that a person is told with authority. This combination of cynicism and naïveté is very typical of the modern individual. Its essential result is to discourage him from doing his own thinking and deciding.

—Erich Fromm, Escape from Freedom

The celebrity is a person who is known for his well-knownness.

—Daniel J. Boorstin, The Image

Intellectuals

Nothing is as imprecise in the social sciences as the term “intellectuals.” It makes no sense to define intellectuals as mental-work specialists or creative professionals, for the majority of artists and academics never rise to the cultural and moral plane that is the domain of the true intellectual. As Lewis Coser puts it, “Intellectuals ... are not only puzzling but upsetting to the run of ordinary citizens. Yet, without them, modern culture is hardly conceivable. Were mental technicians and experts, their distant cousins, to pre-empt the field that intellectuals now occupy, modern culture would likely perish through ossification” (Coser, 1970, x).

Intellectuals raise issues concerning humanity. They are people who are not restrained by a single point of view or concept, discipline or perspective, culture or ideological preference. A master of his/her discipline or art becomes an intellectual by transcending its limits, when he/she succeeds in translating his/her field’s problems, themes,
and ideas into a general cultural framework within which professionals from other fields and disciplines can operate. An intellectual, therefore, always fulfills the function of mediating interpreter or critic. Humanity, which expresses itself in such myriad ways, can hardly be encompassed by a single plane of theoretical, aesthetic, religious, or mystic experience.

The intellectual balances (and sometimes even migrates) freely between levels of human experience and between different disciplines, analytic perspectives, and methods. Being—virtually by definition—an existential interpreter, a translator of cultural texts and forms of self-understanding and models of experience, he or she invariably becomes both subject and bearer of a phenomenon, which could be called inclusive identity.

My working hypothesis is that the capability of transcultural empathy and the ability to embrace other identities and forms of humanity through theoretical, aesthetic, and in general existential dimensions of experience is strongly related to the capability inherent in transgressing the limits of a single discipline, analytic approach, theoretical perspective, or method, that is, the capability inherent in multi- or interdisciplinary studies. Intellectuals usually come to provide or at least rectify a common universe of discourse.

Another crucial component in the definition of the intellectual would be a clearer description of the intellectual’s relationship to the sphere of political and economic power. Intellectuals do not participate directly in the sphere of power. In other words, intellectuals are an elite segment of society with no political or economic power. In a study about a question of great and constant concern to Romanian intellectuals—their prewar metadiscourse (the creation and defense of the nation in the face of the threat from Western capitalism and cosmopolitanism), Katherine Verdery stresses, “I generally use the term ‘intellectuals’ in reference not to persons with specific occupational or educational characteristics but to a structural situation: that segment of the societal elite who did not directly hold political or economic power—or … the fraction of the dominant class that was out of power” (Verdery, 1990, 84; see ibid., 81–111; see Tismaneanu and Pavel, 1994, 402–38).

In this context, it would be relevant to recall Ralf Dahrendorf’s theory on the medieval court jester as the predecessor of the modern intellectual. According to Dahrendorf, the jester had nothing to do with the sphere of commonly accepted social roles nor did he have access to political power. Inasmuch as he was far beyond social hierarchy, he was entitled to criticize, even in a subversive manner, the rich
and powerful, up to the king himself. At the same time, the jester, by virtue of being the personification of the out-worldly moral principle, was perceived—though he represented the world turned upside down—as the bearer of wisdom and justice. Therefore, the social function of the “fool” and of the moral mirror of the king resulted from the jester who was mediating between this-worldly political power games and social masquerade, on the one hand, and the otherworldly principles and values of morality, on the other. “Lucky the king who had a wise and courageous fool!” (Dahrendorf, 1970, 53–56).

This is exactly where the role of a “fool” performed by the modern intellectual as a critic of society and culture springs from. However, the twentieth-century totalitarian regimes revealed the intellectuals to have lost their functions of the critical questioning and symbolic correction of sociopolitical reality. Under totalitarianism, intellectuals can only survive either as marginalized mavericks or as underground dissenters. Yet in both cases, they lose a broad public, and the public domain, things essential for making sense of their self-expression and self-fulfillment. Small wonder, then, that all great dystopias of the twentieth century—Yevgeny Zamyatin’s We, Aldous Huxley’s Brave New World, George Orwell’s 1984, and Anthony Burgess’s A Clockwork Orange—have depicted an intellectual-free world of the imagined future. Advanced totalitarian technocracy allows no room for intellectuals who are replaced by mental technicians, narrow-minded experts, single-minded fanatics, functionaries, and specialists in brainwashing (all those qualities are almost perfectly embodied and combined in the character O’Brien from Orwell’s 1984). Neither social critics/public dissenters nor the classical type of scholar survive in the dystopian world.

However, the question arises, Why and how has the distinction between the intellectuals and the intelligentsia, so widespread and inherent in the discursive space of Eastern and Central Europe, been made? In fact, the term “intelligentsia,” as well as its distinction from “intellectuals,” is a specifically Russian invention, although tinged with German influence. “Created by intellectuals, it conveyed at one and the same time a sociological concept, a psychological characterization, and a moral code” (Confino, 1972, 117). Although a sharp distinction between “intellectuals” and “intelligentsia” was for the first time made in Nikolai Berdyaev’s Istoki i smysl russkogo kommunizma (The Origins and Meaning of Russian Communism), the term “intelligentsia” dates back to the late 1860s.

Among the basic features and attitudes that seem to characterize the Russian intelligentsia, Michael Confino lists the following: “(1)
[a] deep concern for problems and issues of public interest—social, economic, cultural, and political; (2) a sense of guilt and personal responsibility for the state and the solution of these problems and issues; (3) a propensity to view political and social questions as moral ones; (4) a sense of obligation to seek ultimate logical conclusions—in thought as well as in life—at whatever cost; (5) the conviction that things are not as they should be, and that something should be done” (ibid., 118).

As for the sense of obligation to seek ultimate logical conclusions—in thought as well as in life—at whatever cost, according to Karl Mannheim, it was deeply inherent in Germany, too. Therefore, a dividing line between the intellectuals and the intelligentsia makes sense in at least two ways. First, it indicates the crucial difference between the intellectuals as a stratum of professionals and the intelligentsia as lay or secondary intellectuals (who, according to Berdyaev’s caustic note, are incapable of creating ideas, theories, or systems of thought, but who are prepared to die for the spread of great Western ideas—no matter whether Darwin’s or Marx’s). Second, this valuable distinction may assist in distinguishing between the upholders of traditions, that is, moderate or conservative intellectuals who are also very important for the symbolic construction of social reality, as pointed out by Mannheim and plausibly reinterpreted by S. N. Eisenstadt, and the radicals—professional revolutionaries, members of political sects, fanatics engaged in subversive activities of various kinds (see Eisenstadt, 1972, 1–19).

“Intelligentsia” in Russia became a pejorative term and was so throughout the twentieth century. Paradoxically, the Russian Bolsheviks and socially minded Russian liberal thinkers, in the first half of the twentieth century, seem to have been equally contemptuous of the intelligentsia. This tendency came from distinct and mutually exclusive sources. As Confino notes:

“Intelligentsia” was consistently used by Lenin to imply: impotent, inconsistent, compromising, selling itself, weak-willed, disgusting. The features of the intelligentsia are instability, flabbiness, wishy-washiness, opportunism, and anarchist phrase-mongering. For Lenin there was no doubt that the intelligentsia could barely lead itself, let alone the peasants, the workers, or, horribile dictu, the party … The anarchists, displaying more civility and restraint than Lenin, consistently used “intelligentsia” as an equivalent of “intellectuals,” and declared that it was “not a socio-economic group, neither a socio-ethical notion.” From the other end of the spectrum came the devastating criticism of
the Vekhi group (Berdyaev, Frank, Struve, Bulgakov) against those who “gave themselves the name of ‘the intelligentsia’...” Although these critics still see themselves as “intelligentsia,” there is ample lexicological and ideological evidence that they mean “intellectuals.” (Confino, 1972, 138–39)

One would think that, to avoid such a confusion of terms, it would suffice to use the term “intellectuals” in a broader sense, thus referring to those, to quote Seymour M. Lipset, “who create, distribute, and apply culture, that is, the symbolic world of man, including art, science, and religion” (cited in Coser, 1970, vii). Yet the functionalist standpoint, embracing all possible constituent parts of the intellectuals as a stratum (from sophisticated bureaucrats, intelligent politicians, and academics to lay intellectuals, freelancers, and artists), is missing several decisive points, namely, the translation of ideas into reality; social and cultural criticism; the importance of movement and of collective identity; the scholarly journal or cultural magazine as the discursive home for programs and manifestos; the construction of a common universe of discourse.

Intellectuals are not only a phenomenon of institutional settings and occupational or educational characteristics; they are also a phenomenon of discourse, joint devotion, and structural situation. To be sure, I do not endorse Julien Benda’s position in assessing the participation of intellectuals in politics in terms of the treason of clerks. Although access to political power is by no means suicidal for intellectuals, it is nevertheless profoundly problematic. The former critics of the establishment may suddenly become a target for social criticism themselves, just because of the substitution of the principle of imagination for the principle of reality, on the one hand, and in virtue of structurally transforming themselves from those who are passionately and critically questioning social reality into those who are expected to shape it and provide the answers, on the other.

Although the old institutional settings for intellectual activities, in our largely bureaucratized and “rationalized” world, are no longer viable and sufficient, it would be too early to bury the intellectuals. At the same time, it would be quite naive to depict present-day intellectuals as the personification of virtue and conscience. They no longer manifest themselves as lonely Teiresiuses and Cassandras. No doubt, the most men and women of ideas today survive either as mental technicians and experts or as academics. We should distinguish between academics and academic intellectuals. Such independent scholars and nonacademic intellectuals as Oswald Spengler, Philippe Ariès, and
Lewis Mumford are quite likely to have been the last page of the story of independent scholarship. Public intellectuals also seem to gradually disappear from the sociopolitical arena.

However, there are signs that intellectuals are still alive and well. In many cases, they manage to adjust themselves to changing reality. They succeed in forming small socially minded groups and critical collectives. In a modern pluralistic society, such groups usually call into question things that are otherwise assumed within the socially and politically dominant discourse. In a society that is sociopolitically viable, they not only fulfill the function of analyzing and criticizing the establishment but also the function of reforming modern pluralistic society and all of its structures, ideological, normative, social, and administrative-political, so that a self-adjustment mechanism would awaken in them and begin to function. Intellectuals thus help to reinforce and preserve the existing political system. They do not allow the existing political system and its structures to ossify (see Vogt, 1993, 7).

Although it would be too early to play funeral music for the intellectuals, we have to admit that their functions and social roles considerably changed over the past twenty years. According to Bauman, intellectuals, who had once served as interpreters in giving frames of meaning to people and assisted legislators in providing a blueprint for a social and moral order, now seek escape in multiculturalism, or the ideology of the end of ideology (see Bauman, 2007a, 125). As Bauman explains it, “To stand up against the status quo always takes courage… and courage is a quality which intellectuals once famous for their … radicalism have lost on the way to their new roles and ‘niches’ as experts, academic boffins or media celebrities. One is tempted to take this slightly updated version of *le trahison des clercs* for the explanation of the puzzle of the learned classes’ resignation and indifference” (idem).

Why did intellectuals stop existing as a class capable of bridging the world of ideas and the world of public affairs? Why and how did they turn into an entertaining and chattering class losing their former ability to raise the standard of political and moral judgment in the public domain or to increase the significance of public morality? And what did happen to the public domain? Why and how did the hero, the embodiment of the conscience, and the naysayer turn into the expert, the sophisticated bureaucrat, the detached commentator, or the celebrity?

That the martyr becomes the hero, and the hero the celebrity, is deeply embedded in the logic of the passage that leads us from pre-modern societies to solid modernity and then from solid to liquid
modernity. The martyr is both a protagonist and a symbol of pre-modern value-and-idea system, whereas the hero is a modern social character and role. According to Bauman, liquid modern society does not need martyrs and heroes anymore. Instead, it favors two principal social roles—those of victim and celebrity. As Bauman lucidly and convincingly argues,

By contrast with the case of martyrs or heroes, whose fame was derived from their deeds and whose flame was kept alive in order to commemorate those deeds and so to restate and reaffirm their lasting importance, the reasons which brought celebrities into the limelight are the least important causes of their “knownness.” The decisive factor here is notoriety, the abundance of their images and the frequency with which their names are mentioned in public broadcasts and the private conversations that follow them. Celebrities are on everybody’s tongue; they are every household’s household names. Like martyrs and heroes, they provide a sort of glue that brings and holds together otherwise diffuse and scattered aggregates of people; one would be tempted to say that nowadays they are the principal factors generating communities were not the communities in question not only imagined, as in the society of the solid modern era, but also imaginary, apparition-like; and above all loosely knit, frail, volatile, and recognized as ephemeral. It is mostly for that reason that celebrities are so comfortably at home in the liquid modern setting: liquid modernity is their natural ecological niche.

(Bauman, 2006, 49–50)

**Commercialism or a Cult of Brutality and Power in Disguise?**

The amount of negative information, brutal images, and violence in the Lithuanian media raises the issue of whether the reasons behind publicizing this sort of information lie in extreme commercialism or in a disguised power cult? Many of us have noticed the inexplicable amount of negative information, brutal images, and detailed scenes and reports of violent acts in the Lithuanian media. The first pages of self-proclaimed “serious” newspapers flash information about violent and brutal clashes in a local drinking hole between partners and couples who abuse alcohol. Criminality chronicles in Lithuania are so inflated and emphasized that it is becoming hard to believe that we live in a country that is not in the throes of war and still manages to uphold its internal social peace.

It is close to impossible to find another country that features so many reports on violence and negative information in its media.
Attempts were made to explain this trend by blaming the growth of the tabloid press and the commercialization of journalism as a whole. Whatever the case may be, this argument is not completely convincing. The press and television in many countries is undergoing rapid commercialization, especially the latter. But neither in England, whose press and television is just as affected by rapid and uncontrollable commercialization, nor in the Benelux or Scandinavian countries can such an abundance of violent scenes be seen. Not to mention that even their tabloid press would hesitate to feature the type of information that Lithuanians are “fed.”

So how can the outbreak of this brutality and power cult in Lithuania be explained, openly identifying the causes? Is outright commercialism simply encouraged by the lack of quality journalism or any valid alternative media or do the reasons lie elsewhere? Are we lagging behind the West, or conversely, are we free from high culture and thus left in the middle of the modern barbarian avant-garde, far ahead of the West where a rich heritage of civilization still manages to stop and restrain this outburst of brutality and vulgarity?

Perhaps we are somewhere in-between the new barbarianism, which is still on its way in the West, pioneer barbarianism—capitalism without democracy (so far this is the Chinese or present-day Russian model, but its spread throughout the world cannot be dismissed), a free market without personal freedom, the strengthening of the economic dictatorship and the accompanying disappearance of political thinking, and the final transformation of politics into a part of mass culture and show business, with the real power and governance falling into the hands of not a publicly elected representative but someone chosen by the most powerful and nonpublicly controlled segment of society—the heads of the central bureaucracy, business, and the media?

Even if there is but a small grain of truth in these gloomy assumptions, they still fail to explain our extraordinary ability of creating an emotional hell and presenting our country as if it were catastrophe-stricken or had become the most terrible place on Earth. It is strange that this internal hell is created by Lithuania itself, while many West Europeans usually describe it as a particularly welcoming, pleasant, and beautiful country. I have socialized with my students, who are from Kosovo, Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, and Serbia, countries that have had and continue to experience real problems. Complaints or talk of Lithuania’s problems appeared overinflated and even improper, compared with countries with a truly oppressive and tragic present-day situation. The key to solving this problem may be a simple detail: We do not relate (and entirely without reason) two mutually related and
determining factors—the overabundance of reports on violence and brutality and their portrayal in our media, and the psychoanalytical implications of our undoubtedly sadistic and masochistic political commentary, where the predominant goal is to belittle others and oneself.

Our brutal and degrading manner of speaking about others or ourselves, that is, social and political commentary as a slow process of self-negation and destruction, has in fact nothing to do with being critical. Healthy criticism is the construction of alternatives and the trial of thoughts or actions from logical perspectives or other knowledge or known ways of thinking. Spoken and mental cannibalism or the moral destruction of one another can mean only one thing—the rejection of free and open discussions and their murder before they can even start. Sadistic language is commonly used to control, to torment, and in so doing, to overthrow the object under discussion, while masochistic language is typified by the type of self-commentary that not even the fiercest enemy of an individual or country would imagine making.

As Erich Fromm noticed, only those who have not taken an interest in such topics may think that sadism and masochism are aspects of the structure of a character or personality that are in opposition to one another. They are in fact closely related and often become entangled into the one sadomasochistic knot, precisely because they come from the one source—the fear of loneliness, rejection by the world, and isolation. As freedom is usually understood by weaker individuals as standing naked and defenseless in front of a dark and hostile world, the only way to save oneself is to break a stranger’s spirit, or one’s own personality.

The dominance of sadomasochistic tendencies in a social character is commonly described by social theorists and psychoanalysts as an authoritarian personality. This concept developed by Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer, and later by Erich Fromm, first of all encompasses the person who denies the idea of “self,” freedom, and independent thinking. An authoritarian personality not only worships and absolves those who have power and rule but also the whole world attuned to those who have this power and those who lack it. Good and evil are directly proportional to the amount of power. A weak person or power-bereft politician is instantly dismissed, with the support of the mainstream immediately going to the one who embodies power and is already on their way to the sphere of influence.

A classic example of authoritarianism and the associated political thinking is Russia, where the most liberal and pro-Western tsars and leaders, such as Alexander II, Mikhail Gorbachev, and Boris Yeltsin, became the most hated and despised because during their time of rule,
the empire weakened and lost part of its territories, power, and influence in the world. This political logic undoubtedly unites the fans of Stalin and Putin, irrespective that there is still a gap separating Putin, the screw holding together the former Soviet Union’s war and police machine, having become the most threatening of Russia’s autocrats in Dresden, and Stalin, a Shakespearean master of evil.

Power and governance are seen as the elements of good to an authoritarian personality and vice versa. Any differences to this rule are understood not as a part of reality, neutral or a thing of beauty, but as a different amount of power and influence. To lead or to obey—and especially to dream of conquering other people and ruling over them, or the unconditional devotion and submission to a stronger entity—are in no way any different from one another. Whoever strives for freedom and the realization of their human potential will always have an aversion to both, loathing ruling as much as submission. Obedience and submission to an authoritarian whose only realities are power relations and dominance are necessary on the way to leadership. After that, you give in to those above you, until you have risen yourself, when you treat those who are weaker with the same disrespect you had endured earlier.

Getting to the point, in his profound study, *Escape from Freedom*, Erich Fromm noted, “For the authoritarian character an ideology that describes nature as the powerful force to which we have to submit, or a speech which indulges in sadistic descriptions of political occurrences, has a profound attraction and the act of reading or listening results in psychological satisfaction” (Fromm, 1994, 281). The authoritarian character is precisely the link that ties criminality chronicles, the disguised glorification of violence and brutality, and our political clowns that will seemingly in no time overtake the leadership of this country. Do not read into my comments that I have in mind the authoritarian servitude of those that do no more than read and watch the violent media—I am not speaking about the victims. The authoritarian personality creates this type of media. It is its revenge on the world, and the dialectics of obedience and power, and the joy of demeaning oneself and others.

**The Decline of the Public Domain: Moral Authority versus Celebrity**

Modern culture is transfused by the power cult. If in militant societies and the totalitarian regimes they are created in power is expressed as was perfectly captured by the O’Brien character in George Orwell’s
Nowhere at Home

1984, that is, as a shoe trampling a person’s face, in industrial and postindustrial societies that have been more or less touched by democracy power does not unveil itself so brutally or simply and thus hides behind various masks.

Might can appear not only as power, that is, justifiable might, under the guise of political and financial power but also as the naturally occurring or artificially created popularity of an individual, such as the notoriety, visibility, audibility, and commentary on every single aspect of an individual’s private life created through the organized actions of television and radio. In other words, power and its masks have become the aim of modern existence—if you are not shown on television, or if the press does not write about you (the content is not important), you do not exist.

The realities of important and influential, that is, powerful, people’s private lives are consciously brought into the light of day in an organized manner and so transformed into public-life facts. Our public space is nothing other than the private lives of influential people, transformed into issues of widespread public concern. To truly have real power, one must be visible. The space-bound journeys of current-day millionaires are not expressions of their desire to observe Earth from a godly perspective and get closer to cosmic greatness, but rather the will to become universally recognizable on Earth and shown from where no one else, apart from astronauts and themselves, have hitherto been shown. Therefore, we must create the maximum distance from the place where we seek acknowledgment. The greater the distance, the more chances for acknowledgment.

The observation of a stranger’s life, along with the observed individual’s inability to withdraw from this state, was once considered a power code and special privilege. Today, it has degraded to the level of public voyeurism—watching a stranger’s privacy and intimacy through a keyhole in the form of a public hidden camera handed over to a mass audience. Reality shows, mass anonymous television entertainment, and the making of stars from nobodies is the perfect transitional state between voracious star watching and the secret hope that one might also become a star one day. The illusion created is that one must only have the desire and the observer will become the observed. These victims of manipulation can never understand that observation can last for a long time, but to be observed lasts only as long as any TV show’s organizers allow.

The observed also observe, both anonymously and on a mass scale—just like the faceless and regular mass TV audience in every consumerist society or morbidly frightened, lonely, and awkward anonymous
Internet site commentators. The plebeians comment anonymously and are left only with the power of pity or illusions of importance and influence. In other words, the mass anonymous observer feeds on the power of the remains of an already used product.

Meanwhile, real power is expressed as the privilege to be observed and universally visible. Or more precisely—not to force one’s way but to put in place living, devotedly serving, loyal megaphones, consumed by emptiness and possessed by the fear of their own unimportance and social extinction. The masses that feed on the illusions of power do not understand that the power model of the late nineteenth century and first half of the twentieth century has been cynically thrust on them—observing someone, you remain invisible and unknown, thinking that in this way your pitiful powers are increased or even doubled. Meanwhile the real postmodern power is hidden in the ability to simply be observed and commented on and, most important, to control and to predict the observation and commentary.

Yevgeny Zamyatin’s dystopian novel We gave modern power the same outline as the utilitarian English philosopher Jeremy Bentham imagined for the Panopticon, an ideal prison project for the nineteenth century, later interestingly invoked by Michel Foucault. You can see and observe the prisoners, while the inmates—also known as your fellow citizens—cannot see you. Because they do not know when they are being watched, the prisoners internalize the state of being observed, and their behavior changes accordingly. They cease being disobedient and threatening. If we translate the concept of evil, which is based on control and fear into the language of freedom, they cease being spontaneous and free people.

Modern consumerist culture attempts to thrust forward the notion that not making it into the dreamed-of zone of visibility and audibility is a failure, which brings into question the purpose of existence. Success in this type of culture is the simplest product of mass spectacle and consumerist happiness. Failure equals nonparticipation in what success is understood to be. Particularly painful failure is when we desire to reach this successful sphere, and suffer if life once again alienates us from this dreamed-of emptiness and universal visibility (after which follows universal invisibility and no less organized ignorance, pushed to the boundaries of oblivion).

What is success in today’s popular culture? Long-lived youthfulness is desirable, with its strongly expressed signs of puberty or post-puberty, such as an infantile intonation and vocabulary, emotionless sex; obligatory changing of partners, as if they were products of mass industry that must be tried lest you be mistaken for lacking an interest


in consumerist joy; as well as a hysterical and highly public reaction to sports matches, competitions, and the like.

This celebration of prolonged adolescence and immaturity will never make room for a calm, mild-mannered, quietly spoken, at times, hesitant person who pauses between sentences. To make it into the sphere of success, you must continually smile, be able to break out in tears of gratitude the moment you are announced the winner of a significant award, thank your family (not necessarily your real family; a family can also be success creators, that is, a metaphor for power-wielding producers and the protective and loving masses). Sooner or later our existential inadequacy, fragility, vulnerability, insecurity, loneliness, and finiteness speak forth—all that remains is fatigue, emptiness, or any number of other illnesses of our civilization, such as feelings of meaninglessness and depression. Were these even known to people of the Middle Ages or the Renaissance?

This raises the question, How do we resist being classified as an (un)succesful person? Probably by remembering the words of the hero of Voltaire’s philosophical satire _Candide_: “Let us cultivate our garden.” Our success and failure is the mask of fate and freedom on the face of social control. There are cases in which success is the creation of a single moment—you are simply in the right place at the right time. If you believe that that moment was meant specifically for you, you are wrong and remove any alternatives for future action. You will treat the progressive and unavoidable wilting of success and its retreat as if it were shagreen leather drawn back, as failure, stigma, and embarrassment.

If we want to be truly beyond control and independent, all that remains is not to seek power. Having attained power, we must pay a price that we will be reminded of when our conscience will dictate completely different words—words that will remain unspoken if we choose power, prestige, and influence. Better not to dominate and control people. It is worthwhile to remember the insights of Daniel J. Boorstin about the difference between a great individual and a famous person—the first creates himself or herself, while the second is a product of the media, the creators of which can disassemble them at a whim, just like a marionette, and return them to their box (see Boorstin, 1964, 45–76).

Continuation of that which you have started and chosen, which became your inseparable part of self, is the victory of individual’s freedom and spontaneity against the anonymous massive and power cult—those destructive trendy powers wearing screaming social masks and attempting to walk in disguise as success and acceptance.
Is it Easy Being an Emigrant?

Probably everyone can recall Daniel Defoe’s *The Adventures of Robinson Crusoe*, which portrayed a man who had lost not only his fatherland but also all of society and every aspect of a social and civilized life. The only member of his ship’s crew to survive, Robinson kept a diary in which he wrote in a pro et contra principle—for and against the situation that fate had dealt him. For—because he was the only one who survived and could continue his journey of life, unlike his friends. Against—because he was left totally alone on a deserted island, without another living soul.

One says yes to life in such a situation because survival seems possible, thanks to the weapons, ammunition, food reserves, and utensils saved from the boat that make his life considerably easier. But, basic physical survival on a deserted island is demanding and requires a great deal of stamina, especially as it is unclear whether any living soul will ever chance upon the island and realize that it is inhabited by an unlucky Englishman from York. Many emigrants could keep a similar diary. In fact, it is continually recorded, just not in written form. Robinson’s diary is almost without exception every deportee’s or emigrant’s mental exercise, even if he or she do not remember doing it. A diary is seldom, if ever, kept not because an individual is dissatisfied with what he has. Rather, it is more likely not kept because in today’s world there are in general no clear merits or unambiguous advantages.

The differences are obvious and do not demand complex interpolation in cases of escaping from a contemporary secular hell, or totalitarian regime, where the only pleasure is physical survival and a crust of bread for unquestionable obedience and doglike loyalty to a uniformed master. Yet the situation becomes more difficult when individuals emigrate purely to live as those in the mythologized West. Everything comes at one cost or another. The cost of a better and safer life, greater independence or freedom, or a rewarding professional life is emigration. And emigration can only be seen as an unequivocal positive by those who have not experienced it for themselves or for those whose life in their homeland, from a social and self-realization aspect, differs little from life elsewhere.

In the novel *The Little Golden Calf*, by Ilya Ilf and Yevgeny Petrov, the main character Ostap Bender, a charming crook and adventure seeker, proclaimed to his chum Shura Balaganov, a thief, that emigration is a myth of life after death. Anyone who dares to go never returns. Ostap Bender’s sociological hypothesis is simply excellent—emigration is based on the belief in the potential for an additional
life and dismissing one’s current position in life as a one-off, easily predictable existence not worthy of continuation.

Life is to be found there where it is missing—this assertion is typical of the provinces that hate their villages and towns and are not far from becoming the proud defenders of the advantages of life in a ridiculous metropolis, even if they know little of its history or culture. However, this condition is repeated to the detail by those wishing to show off in front of their country, which has displeased or disenchanted them, or among emigrants striving to regain the feeling of respect they lost in their homeland. The paradox of emigration is that often today’s emigrants need to discover for themselves a relatively unpleasant fact, that change comes from emigration only at a certain level of existence, but not in the person’s life as a whole.

There are no good or bad countries, there are only favorable or unfavorable conditions where an individual is either needed or not—irrespective of their profession, age, self-awareness, or level of aspiration. But does not this type of internal migration occur every day by living in one’s own country? Whose life undergoes more dramatic changes? That of a qualified laborer, who can earn more in Ireland or Great Britain than in Lithuania—where the difference is not between a good or bad country but between countries having a different economic potential? Or someone who requalifies in familiar yet ever-changing social surroundings yet is deprived of their profession or perhaps even their creative outlet or potential for self-realization? Human resources make gains in a stronger economy that attracts youth and most economically active layer of society of a weaker country—a natural progression that was perfectly clear to Karl Marx and his students.

Whose life is easier? This individual who, because of being overworked, was never an active member of society in his own country, and while living immersed in a foreign language and culture, becomes even more “wrapped up” in his own life and experiences, remaining in a contented ghetto environment with like-minded nationals? Or this individual who treasures socialization under familiar conditions and life within his own culture so much that he accepts that his profession (which is most often intellectual and demands continuous diligence and professional development, e.g., a physician, a teacher, or a researcher) in his native country is completely undervalued and thus cannot guarantee neither security nor dignity?

If the latter sacrifices his ambitions and chooses another profession or decides to undertake a mechanical job with no potential for creativity whatsoever, to the degree of being primitive to the extreme yet provides a wage from which sustenance is not likened to a luxury (a
situation which academics teaching in certain higher education institutions are familiar with), is this individual’s condition not more dramatic than an emigrant’s who can do what he knows best and regains his dignity working in unfamiliar surrounds? Is it easier and better to remain in your social space, which every day impinges on and takes away a little of your dignity, yet where you can speak your own existential language and feel a part of an imperfect and defective society, or to “privatize” your life in a foreign and rarely comprehensible environment, renounce any hope of becoming a full-fledged member of another society, but therefore enact revenge on your homeland which treated you unfairly?

There is no one answer to these questions and never can be. This has merely been an overdramatized account of the life changes people encounter when leaving their country. However, until now there has been no serious reaction to the thousands of invisible human dramas unfolding in our country. Why does a farmer’s hardship have to be more important to the state than a laborer’s or a laborer’s struggle appear more important than a scientist’s? Why are those who decide to live abroad, but feel more at home there, portrayed in their home countries almost as the heroes of a tragedy from antiquity, yet those who remain in their home country and are dismissed to the farthest reaches of their creative field considered to be less important?

Maybe someone could suggest one answer to satisfy everyone? I alas, cannot. Writing about such a sensitive and deeply personal experience as emigration can only be done from a personal perspective. Otherwise, those who have lived in the shoes of an emigrant will immediately sense that the language is dead and impersonal, which provides a safe distance from the object under analysis.

At this stage, I must be honest. I have experienced the life of an emigrant. For almost eight years in fact. It was only due to the important position and huge efforts of a colleague in Lithuania that I was able to return to my country, which I had almost already said farewell to in my thoughts. To this day, I am still unsure whether I would one day need to return to the “track,” as my wife and I called our constant moving on to another country with its new academic institution. Escaping from partial emigration can only be done through absolute emigration, that is, completely breaking away from the world, or death. In fact, people with a more sensitive or sharper sense of humor see emigration as a metaphor for both of these travails.

Ostap Bender understood this perfectly, explaining to Shura Balandganov that there are no former emigrants and that there is no return
from emigration. Let us interpret the great adventure seeker’s socio-
logical observation: There is no going back once you have already
tried running away from your own former naïve world, where life was
so good, believing in the idea of a secularized Western heaven. Ilf and
Petrov, who had witnessed the white-picket-fenced America, wrote
about this phenomenon with such depth and subtlety, that no one else
except for those with a barbaric modern Soviet Union background
could understand and feel a more beautiful, humane, yet in its own
way, merciless version of Western modernity, where one’s success is
also immediately known to the authorities.

When you return home from a period of emigration, you gain an
even sharper understanding that longing for your homeland is more
pleasing than living in that homeland. At the same time, it becomes
even clearer that your entire self is just as unnecessary in a given for-
eign country, as in your home country—one part of you is needed in
one place and another part is needed elsewhere. For example, voting
and the ability to speak your native language are needed at home,
while your profession and labor is needed elsewhere. You can remain a
statistical unit and strengthen the ethnic or cultural majority at home,
yet you can build your professional life and preserve your human
worth and individual dignity elsewhere.

A Swedish colleague once told me that an emigrant’s opinion of
Sweden would be viewed critically by Swedes, especially if they hap-
pened to be from an intellectual background (this is in fact the truth,
as I learned of the unfortunate fate of certain recognized American
academics in Sweden who were not afraid of voicing their opinions).
This is because Swedes firmly believe that their country is more just
and better than other countries—usually the root of Swedes’ paternal-
istic approach to their neighbors, whom they consider first of all wort-
thy of protection and wise leadership but not a real and equality-based
partnership—and naturally emigrants must be thankful to live there.

Then I did not react in any serious way to the words of my col-
league. A lot could be said by someone about his own country in a
moment of incomplete satisfaction of having to live there, and taking
an ironic look at those in power. It was only later that I understood
that among the politically correct (and essentially comical) banter
about heaven on earth, a gulf between the most intellectual and just
politicians, and the realistic yet thoroughly disguised attitude toward
foreigners is opening up, and only those who are more concerned
with freedom and self-realization than gratitude to one or another
country or its government can remain unscathed.
It is not only loyalty that is expected from foreigners but also 100 percent involvement in the local social and moral order. If this involvement is supplemented by demonstrative gratitude and enthusiasm, the emigrant’s chances of earning emotional security and acceptance into the new environment increase. Everything is perfectly acceptable; it is just a question of what those who find happiness in change should do? What should a reformer or social critic, not an obedient worker, do in a foreign environment, that is, someone who has the potential to change his life and directly influence it, instead of using all of his energy desperately trying to become no more than a statistic serving another country’s institution. No matter how defective your home country may be, if you belong to its creative field and have an intellectual profession, you have the ability to introduce change and leave a more or less identifiable mark on society. Perhaps even create or improve a form of life.

But what can be done in places such as England and probably the whole British Isles where there are 100-year-old institutions and customs in place, where at most, you can only find acceptance but not be transformed into a reformist or, at least, a revisionist force? Much the same can be said about any West European country, which first of all takes away an emigrant’s voice and power to bring about change but gladly adopts their localized and neutrally valued competency. In fact, the same logic applies not only among different countries and societies but also among institutions of unequal power and prestige.

These countries require a workforce, not values or ambitions for their improvement. They can take care of improving themselves; all they ask is that emigrants work. If these conditions are unsuitable, remain in your home country (or institution) and improve matters there. A stronger economy simply takes in your work and talents but not your personality and its unique expression. This does not apply to movement between the different elite layers of society, powerful corporations, or elite universities—they are all the more likely to be interested in a potential reformist from the outside. Tensions and ambivalence are the domain of the weak.

No one knows how to reconcile these schizophrenically shattered fragments. Your native country perhaps really does need your sensitivity and value-oriented state of being, while your profession and creative life can be totally devalued and cast aside. This is perfectly clear, leaving no reason to descend into self-pity and self-deception. Happiness in a foreign society, especially if it has a stronger identity and is more economically and politically powerful than your own, is the joy of acceptance and the adjustment to 100-year-old traditions,
no matter how much it would be disguised with the changing masks of modernity.

But happiness for everyone is not only the expression of the emigrant’s capability to adapt and become the type of citizen an institution or its appropriate supporting class expects. I do not wish to dedicate my life to a foreign country’s institution and a single environment, instead of dedicating my life to my culture. Just the same, I do not want to be indebted to another country if my gratitude loses its authenticity and is taken as an adaptation mechanism and guarantee of emotional security.

Whatever the surrounding conditions emigration is an existential, not an economical choice. We choose a form of life, not just money and security. But if we are truly approaching a civilized state of being, where the boundaries between direct and virtual participation in our society’s life will gradually be erased, perhaps everything I have just written about will simply become irrelevant? I am troubled by the suspicion, that such conditions will not eventuate, because emigration can be likened to Homer’s Trojan War: The mortals believe that they are fiercely fighting for Helen, the humiliation of the King of Sparta, Menelaus, and the hostility between the Achaeans and Trojans, while in fact the gods of Olympus that are engaged in an internal conflict.

Emigration, immigration, and the associated hopes and fears are a huge field of tension stemming from globalization, where the will (and necessity) to use a foreign and cheap workforce on one hand, clashes with the hope to not take on the culture of this workforce and remain within one’s own culture and identity zone, on the other hand. How can a good life and use of a foreign workforce be combined with maintaining a familiar culture, language, and historical identity? How can this servitude of foreigners, inherited from ages of a hierarchical society, be legitimized in the face of the modern world’s promise of equality? The answer—by trying to integrate, to assimilate, or to simply keep the other at a safe distance (isn’t that what is meant by the whole ideology and practice of multiculturalism?).

Emigration, immigration, and all the apprehensions that go along with them are an expression of the tension between the enthusiasm of a global economy and the dreams of a local culture, that is, the dream to live simultaneously amid one’s own culture and surroundings. What else could be meant by Europeans’ skepticism of mass American culture and its worldwide success? Neither denies the advantages of a global economy model, which they gladly use themselves as soon as they find employment in the United States. But no one wants to
lose their own cultural surroundings, as no one wants to adopt a new culture as part of the one global economy package.

So, is it easy being an emigrant? I would say no. Just as it is difficult not being an emigrant.

**Wandering and Independent Scholars**

The terms “wandering scholar” and “gypsy scholar” are all too familiar to those who have had to change jobs often, and who are constantly searching for new assignments. An even better understanding comes from my having been in these shoes personally. In fact, “wandering scholar” and “independent scholar” are no more than euphemisms disguising the sad reality of these people who see no reason to celebrate their wandering lifestyle of constantly changing jobs and places of residence. They would like nothing more than a stable position, but this style of employment is out of their reach; hence, they are always on the road.

Forming any kind of attachment to their temporary academic port is impossible, as they know that shortly they will be on their way again. The stronger the ties to a new position, or the deeper the friendships one allows oneself to form, the harder it is to move on, the longer the experience stays in one’s memory and the more painful it becomes. This type of lifestyle leaves no room for long-term commitments and fostering feelings of belonging to a particular community.

Intellectual topography and relating oneself to an ever new position and colleagues (there is usually closer involvement with other wanderers or foreigners, rather than an institution’s permanent staff) become essential aspects of this lifestyle. Institutions allow you to be part of their ritual only for a short time and leave a niche for meeting with colleagues and students yet become distant as soon as you try to forget your guest status and that you are a mere episode in its saga of duration and dynamism.

The logic of duration and traditions and the joy of unchanging and repeating routines are reserved for an institution’s own permanent staff, while constant change and the joy of discovering new people and places is a grand privilege of the “independents,” that is, foreigners and wandering fellow countrymen. Other wanderers or foreigners do not hesitate to protect you from their university’s assumed superiority, power, and political games. The gates of stability are also firmly closed to other wanderers and foreigners, which is why it is easier to form genuine friendships with them. The permanents, that is, those holding permanent or at least long-term posts, give you the third degree
to work out whether you aspire to seek out a permanent spot for yourself. If the answer is no, relations are instantly warmer and are bound to improve, but, if the answer is yes, you instantly get the polite but cold shoulder and the topic is never brought up again.

Wandering scholars are people of a liquid modernity who believe, or desperately try to convince themselves and others around them, that short-term relations and projects in our professional life help avoid stagnancy, continuously offer new opportunities, and are more rewarding than long-term commitments. Wandering scholars and independent scholars are global thinkers who long to become local activists but not necessarily in their immediate surroundings. The irony of the history of Europe and the Western world is that once upon a time it was considered a great honor and privilege to be an independent scholar. Instead of leaving their fate with universities, they chose journeys and the path of serving as educators of aristocrats and monarchs. This was the road taken by almost all of Europe’s great thinkers—Descartes, Spinoza, Locke, Leibniz, Voltaire, and Diderot.

Locke, who educated Earl of Shaftesbury in philosophy (and not without reason as the latter became an important and noteworthy thinker), Voltaire, who was the philosophy tutor of Prussia’s Emperor Frederick II, also known as Frederick the Great (a student who despite being of noble blood penned some deeply contemplative works), and Descartes, who led Christina, the Queen of Sweden, through the philosophical labyrinths of the mind, symbolize true nonacademic and independent philosophers. Spinoza was probably the one who most embodied this freedom—after the release of his *Theologico-Political Treatise* he was appointed to chair the Faculty of Philosophy as professor at the University of Heidelberg, but he rejected the renowned university’s offer and stayed on at his optical devices workshop in Holland and continued his trade of a lens grinder.

In the later era of modernity—the second modernity era, as proclaimed by Ulrich Beck, or the liquid-modern era, in the words of Zygmunt Bauman—everything changed beyond recognition. Wandering academics became living beacons to the new sociocultural logic, which has been completely adopted in our times. Since using the terms “unemployed researcher” or “scholar of no permanent posting” in our “sensitive” Western societies is seen as politically incorrect, a wandering and independent scholar is euphemistically known not only as a “wandering scholar,” or a “gypsy scholar,” but also as an “unaffiliated scholar,” or a scholar having no official affiliations with and not bound to any academic institution.
We have been witness to enormous changes in the Western world and in all Western consciousness. In effect, early modernism is today irrelevant, including the values of the Enlightenment, with the origin of studia humanitatis—or modern humanities studies and interdisciplinary studies, and the formation of non-university-based scholar groupings among the primary values I would mention, and there is a return to the logic of the Middle Ages, where the importance of the individual gives way to the corporation or institution. Importance is given not to the people, but the power segment that incorporates the middle class—from buyers’ guilds to today’s transnational corporations and global bureaucracies. Not the state, but the city and region. Not the individual, but the institution that identifies who one is—all the beginnings of the Middle Age’s social existentialism, revived for today’s world.

Your professional life and whole existence is considered legitimate as long as there is an institution behind you. Without it, you lose elements of your identity and become a nobody. Fleeting college and university titles, living from one contract to the next, and the ever-changing names of cities and countries surface as pieces of a sprawling and fragmented life, allowing power holders or influential groups to identify you as a (situational) somebody. To them you are no more than a curriculum vitae and a series of figures.

What type of people would Descartes, Spinoza, Pascal, Leibniz, or Locke be in today’s world? Charlatans, lunatics, or absolute nobodies. They were the people of early modernity, or the first, stable, self-sustaining and as yet not self-destructing modernity, who had simply outgrown the Renaissance. Today, we would most likely not even know anything about them, as they would not be tied to any well-known academic institutions. The localization and “shutting-in” of scholars and thinkers in academic institutions occurred in the nineteenth century. It is interesting that Oswald Spengler, who hated and held in contempt academic philosophers, gave his work The Decline of the West to be reviewed not by university professors but by an intellectual politician, German Minister of Foreign Affairs Walther Rathenau in 1922.

Never having completed his doctorate degree or adapted to the academic world, Ludwig Wittgenstein was probably the last great nonacademic or semiacademic philosopher in the Western world. But his popularity only became widespread in his Cambridge period, and mainly because of his students and followers. Michel Foucault almost disappeared into obscurity from the academic world—meaning then from the whole existential field—when he was still young, when the University of Uppsala, where he lectured, rejected his doctorate thesis.
on the history of ideas as undefendable. These days this fact may appear as an unfortunate and strange lapse to Swedish academics; yet it is in fact symptomatic of the state of today’s academic world—the road from grandeur to nonexistence, or vice versa, is short and unpredictable.

There can be no other alternative in a world that recognizes a method, group, or institution but not a creative individual. According to Bauman, an academic education, or even more so, the preparation for becoming a scholar lasts considerably longer than most familiar work positions, or postings offering at least a minimum period of succession—it is not only positions that change rapidly and constantly but also the international academic market and the whole demand structure.

Tenured positions are becoming rarer and rarer. They are in effect attainable only by those who have worked for one institution, or the whole system, for many years, or those who are politically in demand by the system. The greatest blessing a scholar can expect are the so-called tenure-track positions that last for three years and leave the door open for contract extension or even perhaps an offer of a tenure position. There are an extraordinary number of candidates for tenure-track positions in U.S. universities, not only from America but also from Canada and other countries. The figure of 150 to 200 candidates per position indicates a fairly regular and nonprestigious rivalry—among philosophers, and humanities scholars in general, there are 300 to 400 candidates to a tenure-track position at a second- or third-rate American university.

Such figures indicate many things. First, that there is an oversupply of humanities scholars armed with doctorates in the West. Standing out in this mass and becoming known on a global scale is no easy task—only the most talented attain this level of acclaim, and only on the condition that they have the support of noble-minded colleagues who are willing and able to help them on their way. Second, it is technically impossible to be unbiased and neutrally overview every candidate’s dossier and achievements when there are 300 or more almost equally good applications. In other words, it all depends on the preconceived opinions and support of influential professors, in effect, a standoff between method and jargon groups, or administrative and political influence groups. Thomas J. Scheff had no inhibitions in naming them “academic gangs” (see Scheff, 1995).

Of the 300 or so “lucky ones,” only a third are short-listed and are then invited to meet with representatives of the university, often during annual conferences held by professional associations, which have for a long time functioned as a part of the academic market.
The last round consists of five or six “finalists” who are invited to the university for an open discussion and are perhaps given the opportunity to hold a public lecture. The rivalry in Great Britain, Australia, Canada, and the remainder of the English-speaking world is not of the scale encountered in the United States but still rather fierce. Whatever the case may be, in this respect, English-speaking countries are considerably more liberal than continental Europe—in English-speaking countries, it is still possible to receive short-term contracts or at least make it to the final interview stage, a feat that is unfortunately impossible for humanities and social sciences scholars in the rest of Europe.

In Europe, if you are not a part of the system and do not have the support of influential powers (the academic bureaucracy and the most influential professors in your field), you simply do not exist. Fortune may smile on you, or recognition and acknowledgment mechanisms in tune with your proudly individual creative and personal values may come into play, but these cases are more often an exception to the rule. Thus, our whole professional life these days can be described as the realization of short-term consecutive projects accompanied by the lack of a permanent position and the strong feelings of insecurity and uncertainty it conjures. Battles are waged not over matters of prestige or money (neither are an attainable feature of this profession these days), but for the right to a minimal sense of stability, emotional security, and predictability—in short, for duration and succession, not for continual change.

When the appeal of living from one project to the next is presented through rose-colored glasses, I cannot help but feel that it is not a postmodern extravagance but simply self-deceit, behind which lies the unrealized and ever-receding dream of having a stable position, to feel wanted and to fulfill one’s human potential in a place that one feels is both important and meets one’s approval—better still if this can be found in one’s own country. Experience shows that most often wandering scholars, who have at some stage not been recognized within their environment and as a result escaped from local intrigues and the banality of power and influence battles, return to this environment when their current position becomes at least somewhat similar to what they have already experienced, at least partly taking on the same rules and criteria but still lacking the sufficient resources and courage to let in the real outsiders.
Eastern Europe on the Mental Map of Western Europeans

Ernest Gellner, in a posthumously published essay on how to rethink and write history at the end of the twentieth century, depicts the collapse of Communism as a disaster. There must be a moral order provided by a civilization. According to Gellner,

The manner of the dismantling of the Russian revolution may come to be seen as a disaster comparable only with the revolution itself. I do not wish to be misunderstood. I write as a life-long anti-communist and anti-Marxist. For a person of my age and background, I belong to what sometimes felt like a small minority of people who never passed through a Marxist phase … Yet I deplore the disintegration of the Soviet Union; not because I ever sympathised with the ideology which had inspired it, but because of concerns about the need for continuity. Marxism had provided the societies under its sway with a moral order—a set of moral values which helped people to orient themselves. They knew what the rules, the idiom and the slogans were. These added up to a system you could understand and adjust to, whether or not you approved of it. An east European living under communism who confronted a person from the free world had a measure of dignity: deprived of many civil liberties, and a western standard of living, he nevertheless belonged to a rival civilisation—one which stood for something different. It had not been doing very well, by its own standards or by most others. But that had not always been obvious and no single individual had been personally dishonoured by the historic mistakes which had led to communism. Today, a typical east European is simply a very poor cousin. If he is an intellectual, his best prospect is temporary or permanent migration. East Europeans do not represent a failed, but important, alternative; they represent failure by the standard norms. (Gellner, 1996b, 34–35)

Gellner’s insights into the collapse of Communism shed new light on how to write and reflect on history in the age of the decline and fall of secular ideocracies. As for the political implications of his critical perspective, he extends it not only to throw new light on the failures of totalitarianism but also to rethink what he terms “the western laissez-faire illusion.” According to Gellner, totalitarianism cannot run an industrial society but neither can pure laissez-faire (see ibid., 36–38). This is why Gellner favors a skeptical social democracy instead.

Most importantly, Gellner touches on a sensitive issue. An American, a Brit, or a German, does not need to say a word about his or her identity, as it speaks itself with a voice of economic and political power of a given country. Yet an Eastern or East/Central European,
having introduced himself or herself or having been identified as one, necessarily has to switch to a historical-cultural or, more frequently, a post–Cold War narrative telling a moving story of his or her country’s belonging, albeit disrupted and arrested, to the West. Therefore, Eastern Europeans often do not have any other option than to submit their life stories and personal details to a political or cultural history lesson about their respective country that is offered to Western Europeans. This is why they usually do not introduce themselves as flesh-and-blood human beings; instead, they tell a story about their country and its heroic efforts to become present in, and part of, the West.

In doing so, they are bound to become part of their country’s historical narrative or to criticize that country in harsh terms just to be able to examine their own self-worth and to present their person. Ambiguity of their country easily allows them to improvise an identity that allegedly is deeply rooted in history and linguistic-cultural paraphernalia, as if a storyteller would have no other faculty of his or her soul than exotic otherness or ambivalent and unpredictable belonging to the Western world or, more symptomatically, Western civilization. The ambivalence, ambiguity, un easiness, volatility, versatility, and unpredictability of their belonging mean they have ready-made identity stories and documented narratives at work. The less known and the more ambiguous your country, the longer your historical-cultural narrative becomes. You are supposed to have a strong, distinct, resilient, yet curious and exotic identity precisely because you do not belong here. The need for a strong and versatile identity springs from loosening or abandoning the sense of belonging. We allow and even encourage others to be as distant as possible when we deny them access to our ideas and politics, and we want them to serve as facts or empirical evidence that would support our theories and blueprints for social and moral order.

This is to say that for a more sophisticated milieu in the West, Eastern Europeans become Communist or post-Communist storytellers; in less fortunate circumstances, they serve merely as living proof of the increase of the purchasing power or social mobility of Eastern Europeans. This forced production of self-introductory and self-justificatory narrative, not to mention colonization of memory and self-comprehension, is what happened to Eastern Europe on the mental map of the West in the era of liquid modernity. Things were quite different in the era of solid modernity, though.

As Larry Wolf plausibly argues, Eastern Europe emerged on the mental map of Enlightenment philosophers as a vast and largely imagined territory of chaos, ambiguity, ambivalence, backwardness, and
barbarity as opposed to harmony, rationality, lucidity, and civilization emanated by Paris, France, and Europe in general (see Wolf, 1994). This sort of mental map and a curious, yet hardly accidental, trajectory of Enlightenment consciousness led Voltaire to depict Russian, Polish, or Bulgarian aristocrats in his philosophical tales and plays (in *Candide*, Voltaire disguises Prussians as Bulgarians), although he never visited Russia or Poland. The philosophes imagined Russia and its provinces as a perfect experimental territory to try out their political ideas and projects. Jean-Jacques Rousseau attempted to draft a constitution for Poland without ever visiting the country. Denis Diderot served the Russian Empress Catherine the Great as her chief librarian and mentor of philosophy. Voltaire confined his service of this kind to mentoring the Prussian Emperor Frederick the Great.

Small wonder that the French writer Prosper Mérimée, in his horror story *Lokis* (1869), set in Lithuania, depicts a noble who is half bear and half man and who enjoys feasting on human flesh (*lokis* or, more precise, *lokys*, is Lithuanian for “bear”). The Irish writer Abraham “Bram” Stoker writes, at the beautiful English town of Whitby, the vampire tale, *Dracula* (1897), whose main character, Count Dracula, comes from Transylvania—incidentally, the name of this part of Romania sounds as odd and unfamiliar to the ears of a European as that of Lithuania.

Why should we wonder, then, at the American writer Jonathan Franzen’s novel, *The Corrections* (2001), where Lithuania is depicted as a backward and devastated country, or at Thomas Harris’s crime novel, *Hannibal Rising* (2006), whose main character Hannibal Lecter, M.D., a psychiatrist and cannibalistic serial killer, was born in Lithuania? All these fictional stories and characters located in what appears to be Europe and yet not exactly Europe, or yet another Europe, allow us to conclude that anything can happen in Eastern Europe. With good reason, therefore, a good part of Giacomo Casanova’s adventures, as his *Histoire de ma vie* (1794) vividly testifies, occur in Russia. Or recall Baron Munchausen’s incredible stories, penned by Rudolf Erich Raspe in *The Surprising Adventures of Baron Munchausen* (or *Baron Münchhausen’s Narrative of his Marvellous Travels*, 1785), which lead us, among other places, to Livonia, that is, the Baltic lands.

However, no reason exists nowadays to describe Eastern Europe as a territory of ambiguity and ambivalence. Western Europe has lost its belief in the solid and lasting foundations of its own social and moral order. On the other side, Islam and Muslim countries are cast as the only territory of overt and covert threats, fear, and loathing. An
Eastern European, if she or he happens to be an intellectual, having become a poor cousin instead of a rival or enemy, is bound to choose between (1) parroting Western right-wing Islamophobic propaganda or left-wing tirades against Israel and America or (2) examining his own life and taking a moral stand, opening up for, and sympathizing with, those who have succeeded them as cultural/civilizational curiosities, newly produced enemies, or evil forces.

Indifference, rather than contempt or intense loathing, is characteristic of Western Europe’s attitude to present Eastern and Central Europe. Another threat to Eastern/Central European intellectuals, in terms of their marginalization or sociopolitical and sociocultural mis-cast, comes from their own countries where the traditional roles of intellectuals as the personification of the conscience and as the principal driving force behind the nation-building process disappeared over the past twenty years, as if those roles vanished in the air leaving no trace. Being unable to enjoy their life and work in the truly prestigious academic institutions, as none exist or are identified and celebrated as such in the countries of incessant change and direction-free transformation, Eastern and Central European academics and intellectuals are bound to choose between shifting their roles toward the field of political power and prestige—becoming Realpolitik experts and advisers, or specialists in public relations and entertainment at home (trying to escape marginalization and poverty)—and temporary or permanent migration in North American or Western European academic towns and universities.
We must distinguish unfinished works of art from the nonfinished in artworks. In Michelangelo and Paul Cézanne, the nonfinito (Ital.) is the inclusion within the work of a contributory inconclusiveness. The uncut stone, white canvas, or abandoned subplot in an artwork provokes heightened awareness of the artistic process. The presence of the unworked material amid what has been worked-over makes us participate in the making of the work. A gain, not a loss. The work’s unity incorporates the undone in this sophisticated kind of artistic doing. The nonfinito shares with the ruin enjoyment in the discovery of material, contiguity of the formed and the unformed, and springing forth of form.

—Robert Ginsberg, *The Aesthetics of Ruins*

**NATURE AS HISTORY**

On the island of Gotland, one of my most loved places in the world, two film geniuses have given nature another form. They have transformed it into an important aspect of cultural history, and of their biographies. This fragment of nature has become a part of humanity’s cultural and aesthetic memory. The mere mention of Gotland instantly leads to the easy identification of both film masters. They are Ingmar Bergman and Andrei Tarkovsky. Bergman’s name is closely associated with Fårö, a small island of Gotland, where he sought relaxation for many years and spent the last years of his life after the end of his intense creative period.
This island is well known in the film world for its unique light, a feature that cinematographers have been aware of and appreciated for a long time. The rocks, sun, and water combine to form a certain brightness and mood, which is just as easily recognized by those not wielding a camera. Sven Nykvist and other Swedish cinematographers have filmed on Fårö, and it was here that Bergman filmed his immortal film *Persona*.

Tarkovsky chose Gotland as the location for his last film *The Sacrifice*. It most likely appeared to him that Fårö had already been made too well known and overexploited by other film creators. The Russian film master needed a location that had no signs of time, history, or culture. He found this timeless space on the small island Närsholmen, which in Swedish means a near or low island.

The two great masters of film were in awe of each other. Tarkovsky loved Bergman’s films and held them in the highest cinematographic regard. It is most likely that these same feelings were reciprocated by the masterful Swede. Bergman has admitted, even in print, that he had always considered Tarkovsky to be an artist who had succeeded in creating a special language of film that he himself strived toward, and that in his films, Tarkovsky had managed to convey that which Bergman had always felt and wanted to share, yet could not find the adequate film language or poetics.

Had they ever met each other? It does not appear so. Bergman was present at the same Cannes Film Festival that Tarkovsky attended with his film *Nostalgia*, created after he had already emigrated from the Soviet Union to Italy, which was awarded the Grand Prix Spécial du Jury. Bergman wanted to approach Tarkovsky but did not dare approach a genius of his stature. Ironically, Tarkovsky was just as timid—he did not believe he had the right to disturb the great Swedish master.

Are they similar artists? Yes and no. They are as similar as Frans Hals and Rembrandt, Dante and Petrarch, and Shakespeare and Cervantes. Both were geniuses. Creators of a language of art and cultural form, maybe even creators of a distinct consciousness. However, the differences between them are great. The image was always important to Bergman, in particular masterfully composed photographic images, or portraits that exposed the story behind an individual’s internal consciousness. This explains the caliber of actors Bergman required—the faces of Liv Ullmann, Max von Sydow, Erland Josephson, Ingrid Bergman, and Harriet Andersson are key in his films.

Bergman’s greatest strength is the piercingly psychological nature of his films and the exposure of his characters’ deepest interpersonal layers. Psychoanalysts would have surely expounded on the minute
nuances he captured, as only Bergman could. In fact, it is difficult to grasp the modern forms of sensitivity and interpersonal relations of this day and age without having seen Bergman’s films. I cannot imagine how to give a university lecture on the concepts of death and their dynamism in Europe without reverting to an analysis of Bergman’s *Wild Strawberries*—a masterpiece that reveals the secular world’s obsessively numbing fear of death or its desire to set in stone one’s whole life using the limited and fragmented tool that is memory. Death and the secret of survival in the face of death also dominate my most loved Bergman film, *The Seventh Seal*.

As mentioned, how can we understand modern fanaticism if we overlook the characters from three of Bergman’s films, whose surnames are all Vergérus? And how else can we understand the depths of broken-down relations between a mother and daughter, or understand the fact that parents who ignore and express no love for their children merely increase the number of unhappy and traumatized people in the world if we have not seen *Autumn Sonata*?

Ingmar Bergman is the Sigmund Freud of cinematography. Like no one else, he has opened our eyes to the ambivalence of interpersonal relations tormenting people, the stubbornly and resolutely hidden pain of children or couples, and the expressions of hidden revenge against parents or partners for a ruined life. *Odi et amo*—poet of the love-hate relationship on film, he has explored the everyday psychological hell that calm, civilized, modern, and otherwise decent people have managed to create for each other.

Fårö most probably was to Bergman a projection of his soul—nature as a face, unique and keeping its individuality hidden. It is no accident, perhaps, that the rock and cliff formations on the shores of Fårö appear to represent human bodies and faces. Such works of nature could no doubt be examined for a lifetime. At the same time, this is a location for quiet contemplation and self-confrontation, a place where all social masks invariably melt away.

Meanwhile Tarkovsky’s films reveal a totally different world. If Bergman is said to present the quiet, everyday psychological hell, the existence of which no one suspects (in other words, Bergman’s hell is not the final retribution for having lived a faithless and sinful life but the everyday destruction we endure, born of insensitivity and failing to understand as much of ourselves as our fellow human being), then Tarkovsky reveals man’s violent and hellish suffering as the unavoidable result of disbelief and spiritual degradation. Hope remains only with those who believe.
Bergman reveals the agnostic or one who is painfully searching for themselves or God, while Tarkovsky deals with the deeply faithful, one who has encountered modern-day disbelief in everything and the depths of spiritual emptiness. Bergman’s imagery portrays the bodily movements and facial expressions of a weak, lost, irritable, and hysterical individual, while Tarkovsky creates his images as if he were a great painter, to whom people’s faces are no different to moving and falling glasses, vases, candleholders, and books.

After *Andrei’s Passions*—for a long time in the Soviet Union this film was titled *Andrei Rublev*—no further doubts remained that Tarkovsky’s genius lay in making the connection between the mystery of belief and the beauty of iconography, no less than that seen in Theophanes the Greek and Andrei Rublev himself. In *The Mirror*, he easily moves from Leonardo’s reproduction to the image he is creating himself, just as the canvas of Piero della Francesca in *Nostalgia* is worthy of the Madonna’s image in the church.

The Russian cinematographer Georgy Rerberg, who worked with Tarkovsky in the making of *The Mirror* and *Stalker*, deserves a mention here as well, just as it would be hard to imagine Grigory Kozintsev’s great screen productions of Shakespeare without the genius of Jonas Gricius. Nevertheless, Tarkovsky’s greatest appeal lies in his power to relate the great European tradition with objects and nature.

After *Solaris*, it is hard to read Cervantes’ *Don Quixote* and not think of Sancho Panza’s monologue about sleep with the professor, who reads this monologue after his own sleepless nights. Bach’s choral prelude harmonizes with the weightlessness of people and things as they float through the air—along with books and candles. Pieter Bruegel the Elder’s *Hunters in the Snow* appears before my eyes as soon as I remember my childhood and winter.

For the filming of *The Sacrifice*, Tarkovsky searched for a blank space that had no signs of history or culture. It is a paradox that after *The Sacrifice*, Nårsholmen is now associated not with its lighthouse or the wild beauty of Gotland’s coastline, but with Bach’s *St. Matthew Passion*, an excerpt of which is heard in the film. Gotland has been settled by the sounds of Bach and the anticipation of a miracle, thanks to Tarkovsky. It is therefore no wonder that the tree that was used to symbolize this waiting was artificial and specially constructed for the filming.

The traces left behind by Bergman and Tarkovsky are making Gotland a part of our spiritual topography. Gotland is a place where we desire to end up alone—to be with ourselves. A place where nature takes on the symbols of a soul’s history, while also combining time and individual experience. A place where two geniuses left their initials. A
place where the ruins are left in peace, instead of being made and unmade from time to time. A place where nature becomes history.

**THE RUINS AS A METAPHOR OF MODERNITY**

Ingmar Bergman, whose masterpiece, the classic film *The Seventh Seal*, Robert Ginsberg aptly describes in his analysis of the ruins and of representations of Death, lived on the remote and austere island called Fårö, Gotland. It is exactly here that the ruins open up as an open-ended form of being pregnant with the past and capable of inspiring the future, as a possibility for an imagined dialogue with a distant historical epoch, as a phenomenon of *Geistesleben*, that is, as a form of mental life, as Georg Simmel and Thomas Mann would have it, as a museum of the imagination in the sense of André Malraux, and as a subtle hint dropped by our imagination to provide a discursive map of our existence in the realm of modern history and culture.

Robert Ginsberg’s book, *The Aesthetics of Ruins*, invites many considerations (see Ginsberg, 2004). It certainly looks like a major project of his life—elegantly written, closely argued, richly documented, impressively illustrated, and exceedingly readable. At the same time, the book is accomplished with clarity, boldness, decisiveness, and with an extraordinary sense of form and style. It reads like a travel account, a philosophical essay, and a set of insights into the modern condition, thus covering an immense territory of thought and imagination.

It is therefore difficult to call this book otherwise than Ginsberg’s magnum opus, since it can hardly be reduced to standard academic monographs full of conventional wisdom and all too predictable devices of analysis and expression. Ginsberg’s idiom is immensely rich. It embraces a variety of literary genres and forms of academic writing, stretching from lucid and precise theoretical formulations to a poem or an elegant essay or a travel account.

*The Aesthetics of Ruins* might well be described as bold and beautiful academic prose, which reshapes itself in each chapter of the book: It starts as a travelogue and then turns into a philosophical essay only to make a comeback as a sketch or a joke; yet it can reassert itself as a refined interpretation of a work of art. Ginsberg creates something like a carnival of literary and academic genres: His memoirs and recollections merge with travel account and philosophical discourse. He sets in motion the picturesque carnival of the language in the sense of Mikhail Bakhtin. In doing so, Ginsberg overtly challenges the dull, bloodless, faceless, and lifeless language of the bulk of present philosophical books hopelessly drowned in excessive technical jargon.
and in their frame of reference that is all too easily predictable. The beauty of Ginsberg’s language, style, and idiom is barely surprising, keeping in mind that he has a reputation as the master of academic writing and editing.

His is a daring return to Renaissance scholarship unthinkable without the union of literature and philosophy, form and content, beautiful language and wisdom, strict logic and graceful metaphor, theorizing and joke, philosophia perennis and comedy—from this point of view, Ginsberg is quite a legitimate heir to Sir Thomas More, Desiderius Erasmus of Rotterdam, and François Rabelais. The scholarship of More, Erasmus, and Rabelais would have been unthinkable without that same carnival of the language that is an inescapable part of Ginsberg’s dash and style. Obviously, Bakhtin’s theory of Renaissance carnival constructed in the analysis of Rabelais’s *Gargantua and Pantagruel* can be applied to More’s *Utopia*, Erasmus’s *Praise of Folly*, and to the whole linguistic and poetic universe of Renaissance scholars.

How can we separate philosophy from literature by reading More’s philosophical diatribes, parodies, letters, and comedies (of which More wrote quite a few when he found himself enchanted with Lucian, exactly like his best friend Erasmus, with whom More translated Lucian into Latin in Paris)? How could we draw a sharp dividing line between philosophy and literature analyzing the relationship between Niccolò Machiavelli’s *The Prince* and Mandragola, or between *Discourses on Livy* and his other comedies, the latter being astonishingly Roman and pagan both in content and form? How could we ever put aside *Gargantua and Pantagruel* when talking about More’s *Utopia*, if we know that Pantagruel’s mother, according to Rabelais, was the descendant of the Prince family in Amaurote, the capital of Utopia?

At the same time, Ginsberg’s style and overall linguistic idiom are reminiscent of Giambattista Vico’s alternative to Cartesian philosophy. Like Vico, Ginsberg attempts at reconciliation, in philosophy, of all aspects of the language, all faculties of the soul—scholarly and poetic, epical and lyrical, personal and communal, traditional and modern. Like Vico, Ginsberg achieves a happy union of concept and metaphor, analysis and storytelling, fairy tale and discourse, an anecdote and the grand narrative, the *petit histoire* and the *grand récit*.

Ginsberg focuses on the imagination, rather than reason. In this, he is an heir to Vico, too. Bridging aesthetics, philosophy of literature, philosophy of culture, literary theory, essay, fiction, art criticism, and travel account, Ginsberg’s book is full of metaphors, metonyms, anticlimaxes, antitheses, paradoxes, and other tropes or figures
of speech. It comes to explore the edge of the modern and to reveal the horizon of the postmodern.

Of the nonfinished in artworks, Ginsberg writes,

We must distinguish unfinished works of art from the nonfinished in artworks. In Michelangelo and Paul Cézanne, the nonfinito (Ital.) is the inclusion within the work of a contributory inconclusiveness. The uncut stone, white canvas, or abandoned subplot in an artwork provokes heightened awareness of the artistic process. The presence of the unworked material amid what has been worked-over makes us participate in the making of the work. A gain, not a loss. The work’s unity incorporates the undone in this sophisticated kind of artistic doing. The nonfinito shares with the ruin enjoyment in the discovery of material, contiguity of the formed and the unformed, and springing forth of form. (Ginsberg, 2004, 296)

Yet a deliberately unfinished work of art also has its metaphysics and aesthetics, as does an unfinished and open-ended thought. I could offer here nearly the same insight into Ginsberg’s contribution that I wrote elsewhere about Vytautas Kavolis. The affinity of these two great scholars cannot be lightly dismissed as something that comes to my mind by association. The point is that Robert Ginsberg, exactly like Kavolis, greatly contributed to creating a new kind of scholarship, the scholarship of twenty-first century—not theoretically or ideologically “rationalizing” and dividing the human world and social reality, not dogmatically rigid and unreflective, not soulless and totally insensitive about its social effects or political and moral implications, but reflective, ironic, critical, attentive to every detail of human existence, and, most important, perfectly aware of the vulnerability and fragility of the human world.

The ruins appear as a powerful expression and a most telling metaphor of the modern historical, cultural, and moral imaginations. At the same time, the ruins, as a source of inspiration, are inseparable from the philosophy of history and the comparative study of civilizations. Suffice it to mention two English historians who described what appeared to them as the ruins of Classical Antiquity—Edward Gibbon and Arnold J. Toynbee. The ruins of the Capitol in Rome inspired Gibbon to write *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*. The ruins of the Parthenon temple on the Acropolis in Athens, the world’s greatest example of Doric architecture, urged Toynbee to start working on his monumental and voluminous work, *A Study of History*. 
The ruins of Rome inspired the imagination of the great sculptors and architects of the Renaissance, Donatello, Brunelleschi, and Michelangelo. Or recall Hubert Robert, a French Rococo Era landscape painter sometimes called “Robert des Ruines” because of his many romantic representations of Roman ruins set in idealized surroundings. His grasp and vision of a peaceful and serene coexistence of Roman ruins and vegetation—a synthesis of culture and natural life—added an important dimension to our understanding of the aesthetics of ruins.

Yet Ginsberg reveals more aspects of the phenomenon of the ruins. His landmark study of our perception of the ruins, our mind-set, and our modern historical and cultural imaginations provides an interpretive framework for the aesthetics of ruins. By no means are the ruins a symbol of destruction. The ruins signify the triumph of life over death and not the other way around, as it might seem from first sight. Consider chamber music nights and operatic performances set in the ruins or a beautiful flower blooming in the ruins of the Dachau concentration camp.

The latter example is extracted from Robert Ginsberg’s photograph, “Ash Box, Concentration Camp, Dachau, Germany, 1985” (ibid., 423). The book is illustrated with his beautiful photographic plates. What comes to mind, seeing the powerful expression of Ginsberg’s metaphysical optimism so obvious in his picture of the blooming flower in Dachau, is Dylan Thomas’s poem “And Death Shall Have No Dominion.”

Recalling Theodor Adorno’s crucial question of how is it possible to write poetry after Auschwitz, we could refer to Ginsberg and suggest along with him that the flower blooms in Dachau regardless of our ruined lives, anguish, painful memories, disturbing thoughts, and traumatic experiences. Life prevails over death. Creative vitality never fails in the face of brutality and destruction. Why not celebrate life, and why not write poetry then?

The open-ended existence, the invitation of the past graciously extended to the present and to the future, vegetation, and peace between nature and culture are exactly what the ruins are all about. Ginsberg makes it clear that the ruins could be regarded as a universal idiom of human existence. Philosophy, literature, fine arts, nature, TV, cinema are all related to the ruins. Not a single aspect of human existence escapes the ruins. Our life can be ruined, yet it can be made up of the ruins of excerpts, quotes, fragments of knowledge, and the like. This is the ambivalence of life in fragments, which Zygmunt Bauman, most probably, would take as just another term for life in ruins.
According to Ginsberg, our language rests on the ruins of some other languages, no matter whether the modern or the ancient ones—the latter being dead in the sense that nobody communicates life and nobody lives within them anymore. The English language rests on the ruins of Latin and Greek. Half of its modern vocabulary came from French, and the rest from Germanic influences. English is the embodiment of the existence and creative vitality set on the ruins. So, too, I add, is my native Lithuanian, one of the most archaic languages in Indo-European family, which had long been accompanied by the funeral music and buried in the past, yet still alive and well today—the language that survived within the ruins of Sanskrit and Latin.

Moreover, Ginsberg seems to take the ruins as a symbolic reference to the very foundations of our fragmented existence. In doing so, he describes the heart of modernity. The disconnected fragments of life, society, existential experience, philosophy, literature, cinematography, TV, highbrow and popular cultures, kitsch and melodrama (consider his references to Edward Bulwer-Lytton’s melodramas)—all these are the precincts of an immense discursive territory that Ginsberg covers in his highly inspiring, erudite, and sophisticated work.

Does our fragmentary writing mean that we stand, to recall Peter A. Redpath who is quoted by Ginsberg (p. 355), on the shoulders of ruins, that is, on the ruins of the great philosophical systems and of the grand historical narrative? It certainly does. However, fragmentary writing has its unquestionable charms. At this point, Jean Baudrillard sounds quite in tune with Ginsberg. As Baudrillard suggests in the motto on the back cover of his book *Fragments: Cool Memories III, 1990–1995*, “Fragmentary writing is, ultimately, democratic writing. Each fragment enjoys an equal distinction. Even the most banal finds its exceptional reader. Each, in turn, has its hour of glory. Of course, each fragment could become a book. But the point is that it will not do so, for the ellipse is superior to the straight line” (Baudrillard, 1997).

Our body and its mortality can be described as our ruins. Death is a definitive mark of our finite world. The infinity of the finite, the end of the beginning, Death comes to define our place in the universe, history, and society. As Ginsberg graciously consoles us, “Death is essential to our definition as mortals. Without Death, we would not be living creatures. That is the inescapable truth, and the truth will kill us. Every birth certificate is completed by a Death certificate. No matter how dedicated to life, we have been cast in the die of mortality. While God remains dead silent, Death answers” (Ginsberg, 2004, 405).

Ginsberg masterfully combines a poetic allusion, an anthropological ability to be down-to-earth, a psychological sensitivity, a philosophical
detachment, and a sociological involvement. Having described the aforementioned masterpiece of Ingmar Bergman, his unforgettable *The Seventh Seal*, arguably one of the greatest films ever produced in the world of cinematography, Ginsberg goes to Edgar Allan Poe and then to the old Capulet from William Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet*. He quotes them on love and death only to come to the following conclusion:

We, the living, bear Death within. The skeleton, our most intimate ruin, is the backbone of our living flesh. We incorporate, incarnate, encase it. We are skeletons fleshed and ambulatory for the moment. The skull, Death in a nutshell, “that ruined palace of the mind” … when placed upon the desk or in the hermit’s cave, was the simplest grave reminder. *Memento mori*, morbid moment: you too are a skull that gazes upon a skull. One day, your skull may be gazed at by another. No bones about it. (ibid., 408)

What becomes obvious here is that the ruins are a powerful means of moralization—suffice it to mention the *vanitatum vanitas* kind of still-life paintings in Flanders and in the Netherlands of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in which a skull beside food, a glass of wine, and flowers reminded us of human temporality and mortality. Reproaching and severely criticizing humanity for their vanity and wickedness, the painters of the Golden Age of Dutch art acted as secular preachers and social critics.

The skull, the most powerful idiom and reminder of the ruins of the human body, allowed them to dismiss such human weaknesses as the inclination to luxury and self-deception. Much the same applies to the *memento mori* paintings where the flower, the sand-clock, and the skull are most telling details of human fragility, vulnerability, and brief presence in this world.

The initials and inscriptions of great artists and scholars left in their canvases and books appear as an extension and a symbolic equivalent of the skull. They remain quite ambivalent as they cast a shadow of doubt about whether this or that great master left an inscription or initials. An identity-concealment-and-revelation game, a sophisticated variety of hide-and-seek, this phenomenon comes into existence together with the emergence of individualism. Italian, Flemish, Dutch, and German Renaissance masters start signing their canvases, thus signifying the arrival of the Era of the Individual; yet they play identity games that become part of the picturesque carnival of the language and artistic expression. Instead of signing their given and
family names, they drop a hint or leave a mark as if to say that the identification of the master is an inescapable part of the interpretation of the work of art itself.

An identity concealment leaving part of the clue to that identity is a metaphor of the modern identity game that calls for affirmation of existence: I exist insofar as you identify me as a person; say my name, and bow to me as a Unique Individual on the Face of the Earth. I begin existing as an individual only when you identify me and my artwork, which is my silent autobiography. The deeply symbolic and allegoric nature of Renaissance and Baroque art invites and incites a viewer, an eyewitness of being, to experience a joy of revelation, deciphering hidden meanings and allusions. Like an allusion or allegory, our identity is just a mask covering the face of being. Like a search for an original and unique means of expression or an authentic artistic language, which always remains an effort, our moral choices bring us closer or, on the contrary, distance us from others. Grasp of life and understanding of the other is a continuous path to our own moral substance. If we put it aside, our self becomes merely a mask, a game, and a joke for the sake of amusement of merry ladies and gentlemen.

Als ich kan (as well as I can) is a recurring motto by, and a clue to identification of, the author that appears on paintings by Jan van Eyck. The portrait of the Arnolfini couple, a powerful proof of the miracle of the face of the individual, contains this motto, which allows us to identify Van Eyck’s existential and aesthetic traces there. We hasten to read two letters, RF (Rembrandt fecit, the Latin abbreviation for “Rembrandt executed this work of art”) just to make sure that we stand before Rembrandt himself, and not his pupils Ferdinand Bol, Aert de Gelder, or Carel Fabritius.

Of the ruins of civilization Ginsberg writes: “Thus, we are Roman and Greek ruins, just as Rome is thought to have taken up the ruin that was Greece. The Renaissance, in turn, thought itself to have rediscovered antiquity’s ruins and sought to bring them forth with new life. We have lost that burst of energy and treasuring of the past. We have lost faith in reason and the advance of civilization. In the popular view, past civilizations are dead. But we are rapidly becoming the past” (ibid., 355).

In his meditations and reflections on the ruins, Ginsberg touches on a hot issue—an attempt to fabricate history and to forge historical memory and an obsession to rebuild the historic buildings, although nobody knows what they looked like centuries ago. It is a sort of self-indulging fantasy. This modern folly, which might be termed the “Disneyland syndrome”—similar to what Baudrillard calls the
simulacra—and which usually goes hand in hand with distaste for the ruins, is assessed by Ginsberg in the following remarks on the old Capitol at Williamsburg, Virginia:

Williamsburg plays a persuasive role in American taste. It is first in the lineage of Disneyland and Disney World, Fantasy Island, theme parks, and Hollywood Studio tours. Williamsburg puts the question of taste this way to America: What good is a ruin, when we can rebuild it with ingenuity, accuracy, safety, and convenience? … The restoration, in this view, is more authentic than the ruin, because it is the intact whole put back in working order. In the ruin, we have lost the original. In the restoration, we have lost the ruin, but, supposedly, we do have the original. Williamsburg gives us the tasteful fantasy, not the reality, of the Colonial. Many original intact buildings form part of the fantasy, though we do not notice which ones they are … Williamsburg is a time machine that allows us to indulge in an American specialty, the world of fantasy that we can enter, accompanied by our accustomed conveniences. To dine by candlelight in one of the inns and stay overnight in a four-poster bed is a treat. Williamsburg is a history park that offers a good show to the whole family … The Disney creations go one step further. They do not need the foundations of an original structure or the historical site. Everything can be recreated afresh in a single location, providing all possible amenities for visitors. Everything runs smoothly. Nothing is broken. No ruins, unless they are fabricated synthetically to add authenticity to the scenery. (ibid., 189–90)

Having quoted Ginsberg on this disturbing tendency of modern consciousness, I hasten to add, though, that I am far from the idea that this is exclusively the case in the United States. Baudrillard points out that an object like Disneyland appears as a simulacrum precisely because it creates an illusion that it stands on its own and is unique. According to Baudrillard, in doing so, it hides the fact that America itself, that is, America as a whole, is a huge Disneyland. Therefore, Disneyland is a metaphor, a device, and a symptom of artificiality that conceals the disturbing fact that our so-called authentic reality became just like that and that it constitutes nothing but a colossal fraud. This is to say that whenever we play History, with a capital H, we tend to decorate our mundane reality and its fragments with shining toys and the rest of what we take as paraphernalia of a distant epoch. In fact, we merely conceal the fact that history is dead and that the past cannot make its appearance through beautiful things or glowing facades.

Yet we have seen enough of this modern folly in Europe. At this point, it is quite sufficient to mention my native Lithuania. Lithuanian
authorities have recently decided to immortalize themselves by building from scratch the Grand Duke Palace next to the historic building of the Arch-Cathedral of Vilnius, thus fabricating history and placing the real historical monument in jeopardy. Although historians argued that it would have been much more reasonable to leave the ruins, further exploring and protecting them by conservation, theirs was a voice in the void.

In his recent publications and interviews, Umberto Eco has warned Europe about this obsession to fabricate history, forging supposedly historical images and producing shining artificial objects, instead of preserving the authenticity of ruins and reflecting on what has been marked by history. The unpleasant truth is that the untouched, authentic ruins are not as useful as the forgeries or small replicas of Disneyland. How can we make our petty secular pilgrimage to the holy places of tourist bliss and organized consumption without being able to consume History safely and comfortably?

At this point, the commercially organized and reworked history, or the industry of the past, is a parallel reality that has little, if anything at all, to do with the silent being of ruins whose authenticity calls for an open-ended dialogue with modernity. Ginsberg catches the essence of the interplay of the infinity of the forms manifest in the ruins and of the openness of a modern life in the following passage:

The great cities of Jerusalem, Rome, Istanbul, Paris, and London are constantly struggling to live with their heritage, to sustain a modern life freed from the restraints of their past, yet to keep alive whatever in that past is worth saving. These cities are paradoxes. They cannot be fully modern; they refuse to remain antiquarian. They must creatively encounter the ruin of themselves. Many ways of living with the ruin are possible. We may leave it alone to follow its life, while we pursue ours. We may carefully preserve the ruin, treat it as a public monument, and endow it with symbolic significance. We may also build on the ruin, build with the ruin, or rebuild the ruin. The ingenuities of architecture … are many-storied. (ibid., 187–89)

Ginsberg’s book allows a perspective toward the aesthetics of ruins, the latter appearing as an everlasting possibility of the transformation of reality, a promise of an enchanting modern life, a discovery of the past. Most important, the ruins become a metaphor of modernity with its predicaments, tensions, and uncertainties, which we try to overcome by searching for the solid foundations of our life and identity in history; yet at the same time, we passionately deny history in
favor of the fragments of today. Ginsberg reminds us of this paradox of modernity better than anything else.

As Ginsberg suggests, “we must distinguish unfinished works of art from the nonfinished in artworks” (ibid., 296). The joy that our participation in the realm of the nonfinished in artworks brings us has something to do with our identity infatuations and dramas. What is it? The joy of having a nonfinished identity? Or the joy of the discovery of the collectibles and parts of our identity in the ruins of culture? Or participation in what can never be finished, where every epoch or individual can engrave their names, and where we always have a chance to suddenly discover part of ourselves?

Whatever the case, to collect ourselves and the world around us from the ruins of history and culture is much preferable to the childishly naïve reliance on the modern industry of history and culture, which remakes and reworks the world every day, making us believe that nothing has really changed.


——. *Simulations*. New York: Semiotext[e], 1983.


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