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## Dilemmas of Political Anthropology: Historical-Philosophical Approximations and Current Contexts

**Abstract:** The article is devoted to certain fundamental and discussed threads defined as dilemmas of political anthropology. Starting from specific rudimentary descriptions of human nature, the natural state or natural man, initiated by thinkers described by Barnard as “precursors of anthropology,” as well as referring to the problems of contemporary political philosophy, the papers aims to bring closer the issues concerning the fall of human and his “regeneration,” the “mask regime,” tensions between a human being and society, conflict and cooperation; dialogue and antagonism. The proposed interpretations of the thoughts of Hobbes, Machiavelli, or Rousseau have the character of “retroactive reading.” It means that the references made to historical-philosophical examples activate the contexts of contemporary thought, or even give them new meanings, and at the same time trigger a thought that leans towards the future.

**Keywords:** political anthropology, nature, human nature, natural man, natural state, human being, dilemmas of political anthropology

### Preliminary Characteristic of the Issue

Carl Schmitt, in his reflections on the political, notes: “One could test all theories of state and political ideas according to their anthropology and thereby classify these as to whether they consciously or unconsciously presuppose man to be by nature evil or by nature good.”<sup>1</sup> Bad human nature can be described as corrupt,

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<sup>1</sup> C. Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political*, transl. G. Schwab, Chicago-London 2007, p. 58.

weak, cowardly, even stupid, but also brutal, passionate, vital, irrational. In turn, opposing recognitions identify human nature with rationality, perfection, obedience, and a peaceful attitude. Interestingly, the above approaches to human nature find their expression in narratives referring to animal metaphors and symbolism of the natural world. Schmitt refers, for example, to La Fontaine's fairy tale about the wolf and the sheep and Churchill's statement from 1928, in which, criticizing supporters of disarmament, he argued that even in the animal world, "fangs, claws and sharp horns" are a guarantee of peace and security.

For Schmitt, images of human nature and human life in the state of nature are inextricably linked to the domain of politics. References to the contexts outlined by Schmitt regarding the good or bad nature of a human being correspond to what may be defined as the issue of two "metaphysical" and "mutually exclusive visions of the social world."<sup>2</sup> The first is the vision of society as a unified and harmonious community. It is grounded on the conviction that society has a harmonious nature at its core and that this harmony can be regained by overcoming contingent and irrational obstacles. "This leads to the search for the foundations of future unity in the real features of human nature that unite us all and on which it will be possible to build a future safe, peaceful society."<sup>3</sup> We are dealing here with a mythical image of the "original innocence of man," as well as a reflection on the (im)possibility of its recovery (a perfect example of which is Rousseau's philosophy). The second vision is the image of society as a battlefield, antagonisms and disharmony. In this case, the foundations of social unity are seen "in taming antisocial and antagonistic instincts and uniting them together on foundations that man can build on his own."<sup>4</sup> This constructive, as well as — one is tempted to say — disciplining force, is supposed to be a human reason. The "image-idea"<sup>5</sup> of transcending the antisocial, egoistic nature of a human being is Hobbes's Leviathan as a symbol of the rationally motivated necessity of universal agreement. In the first vision of social existence, what is universal, common to the nature of a human being, usually identifies with human rationality and it is thanks to it that a new form of social life may be created (although it can also be a common tradition, culture, language, world of values). An example of the desire to constitute a new human being living in a perfect and harmonious society is Condorcet's liberal and rationally oriented utopia, which contains optimistic predictions about the future stages of humanity's development. The French author, as Schmitt points out, "no longer considers man to be radically evil and wolflike but good and educable."<sup>6</sup> By the way, the myth of the new human associated with the image of a harmonious society was one of the favourite threads of Enlightenment thought which considered the chances of

<sup>2</sup> A. Chmielewski, *Spółczesność otwarte czy wspólnota? Filozoficzne i moralne podstawy nowoczesnego liberalizmu oraz jego krytyka we współczesnej filozofii politycznej*, Wrocław 2001, p. 6.

<sup>3</sup> Ibidem, p. 7.

<sup>4</sup> Ibidem, p. 8.

<sup>5</sup> B. Baczeko, *Wyobrażenia społeczne. Szkice z nadziei i zbiorowej pamięci*, transl. M. Kowalska, Warszawa 1994, p. 14.

<sup>6</sup> C. Schmitt, *The Leviathan in the State Theory of Thomas Hobbes: Meaning and Failure of a Political Symbol*, transl. G. Schwab, Westport-London 1996, p. 97.

social and anthropological regeneration — a return to the true nature of a human being, the restoration of its original innocence. As Jan Baszkiewicz writes, North America was considered to be the land of new people, a country liberating itself from the yoke of tyranny; white Americans appeared to be “hardworking, physically robust, and morally pure children of Nature.”<sup>7</sup>

All of the above approaches adopt a certain political anthropology. This text follows Helmuth Plessner in understanding political anthropology as, “the genealogy of political life from the basic constitution of man” and “a historically oriented reflection on the mutual dependence in which each time they remain, on the one hand, the understanding of human nature, and, on the other hand, the approach of the state and the community.”<sup>8</sup> In Plessner’s view, one can see a critique of all approaches showing human nature in a substantiated, supra-historical way, as something endowed with universal, permanent and unchanging content. Inspired by Dilthey’s hermeneutics he proposes a notion of “anthropology of the historical worldview.” In other words, a human being does not have nature, but history — a human being is always in a certain historical situation. Man, in his historicity, appears above all as “a being responsible for the world in which he lives” and as “the creator and productive ‘place’ of origin of culture.”<sup>9</sup> Plessner’s critique of substantial and essentialist approaches to human nature — and such concepts seem to have been meant by Schmitt when he wrote about the simplifying anthropological visions also present in political and social contexts — is a particularly strong valorisation of “human openness” (as well as contingency, historicity, individuality), which “manifests itself in *going beyond*.”<sup>10</sup> It is evident in the contexts of Sartre’s existentialism (“existence precedes essence”<sup>11</sup>) or in Nussbaum’s reflections (“at birth, every child is a human being”<sup>12</sup>). In addition, it is necessary to take into account the structuralist and post-structuralist questioning of the idea of ready-made, pure human nature, primordial in relation to the process of socialization, discursive construction, and structures that constitute the social wholes in which the human subject functions. The influence of the ideas of Derrida, Lacan and Althusser in anthropological contexts was marked primarily in feminist and Marxist theories.

It is also worth mentioning that the concept of human nature is a concept that is, so to speak, highly dangerous from a political point of view, as Michel Foucault points out in his debate with Chomsky.<sup>13</sup> Wolfgang Welsch explains the dangers of anthropological discourses about human nature as follows: “The path from structural terror to actual terror is short, or rather none. The difference applies only

<sup>7</sup> J. Baszkiewicz, *Państwo. Rewolucja. Kultura polityczna*, Poznań 2009, p. 779.

<sup>8</sup> H. Plessner, *Władza a natura ludzka. Esej o antropologii światopoglądu historycznego*, transl. E. Paczkowska-Łagowska, Warszawa 1994, p. 5.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 15–16.

<sup>10</sup> N. Rapport, “Natura ludzka. Założenie i nadzieja antropologii,” transl. O. Kaczmarek, P. Stan-kiewicz, *Teksty Drugie* 1 (2018), p. 211.

<sup>11</sup> J.-P. Sartre, “Existentialism Is a Humanism,” [in:] *Existentialism from Dostoevsky to Sartre*, W. Kaufmann (ed.), New York 1956, p. 290.

<sup>12</sup> N. Rapport, “Natura ludzka,” p. 211.

<sup>13</sup> N. Chomsky, M. Foucault, *The Chomsky–Foucault Debate on Human Nature*, New York–London 2006.

to the forms of the phenomenon. Terror appears already at the level of discourse, not only in the concentration camp."<sup>14</sup> A dangerous dimension of the various theories of human nature is their hierarchical and exclusionary character: "a definite vision of human nature has contributed to the maintenance of the power of man over woman, adult over a child, developed over primitive, Western over Eastern, rational over emotional, conscious over spontaneous."<sup>15</sup> At the same time, in contemporary debates, it can be seen that the rejection of the idea of universal human nature is associated with the "rhetoric of closure" and the discourses of exclusionary communality. According to Rapport, multiculturalist identity politics takes on a character similar to the anti-Enlightenment rhetoric cultivating the order of estate society. Thus, in his opinion, the restoration of the anthropological approach to human nature as an open nature — both in the phylogenetic and ontogenetic sense — which would reflect the human ability to "create worlds of life around us with the utmost invention"<sup>16</sup> is of considerable importance. In this perspective, directed against multiculturalist essentialism, culture (tradition, belonging and cultural practice) as a product of human is something unstable and contingent.

For now, the above considerations are only a preliminary recognition of the problem field, which will be discussed further in the article. This work will reflect on some contemporary concepts in which questions concerning human nature are — for the above mentioned philosophical and practical-political reasons — absent or sharply criticized, but which may appear as more or less explicit continuations, polemics or references to certain fundamental and discussed threads defined in this text as dilemmas of political anthropology. Starting from specific rudimentary descriptions of human nature, the natural state or natural man, initiated by thinkers described by Barnard as "precursors of anthropology" (Hugo Grotius, Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, Jean-Jacques Rousseau)<sup>17</sup> as well as referring to the problems of contemporary political philosophy, this work aims to bring closer the issues concerning the fall of a human being and his (or her) "regeneration"; the "mask regime," tensions between a human being and society, conflict and cooperation; dialogue and antagonism. As Barnard notes, views on the concept of the social contract, human nature, society, or culture, going beyond the often highly phantasmatic ethnographic approaches shaped since the Renaissance travellers, played a significant role in the process of creating anthropological discourse. In thus oriented considerations, "politics, religion and philosophical discourse, which later gave rise to anthropology, were closely linked."<sup>18</sup> It is worth mentioning on this occasion — apart from the above-mentioned philosophers — the thought of Pufendorf, referring to Grotius' inquiry about the social nature of a human being. The term *socialitas* which he uses — translated by English interpreters as "socialization" — is a very important category used in contemporary philosophical, sociological or anthropological con-

<sup>14</sup> W. Welsch, "Unsere postmodern Moderne," [in:] A. Zeidler-Janiszewska, *Między melancholią a żałobą. Estetyka wobec przemian w kulturze współczesnej*, Warszawa 1996, p. 17.

<sup>15</sup> N. Rapport, "Natura ludzka," p. 202.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 219.

<sup>17</sup> A. Barnard, *Antropologia. Zarys teorii i historii*, transl. S. Szymański, Warszawa 2021, p. 46.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 48.

texts. The author emphasized what in Greek reflection appeared as a tension between *physis* and *nomos*, strongly valorizing the socialized state of man.<sup>19</sup>

In the presented considerations the reference to the category of social and political imaginarium is not without significance.<sup>20</sup> It seems that imagination is not a domain peripheral to philosophical and political discourses, but quite contrary — these discourses, both historical and contemporary, depend on the power of human imagination and the images it creates. An assumption is made here, which can be called the “anthropology of the image” in reference to Belting’s proposal:<sup>21</sup> it is impossible to define a human being without taking into account his (or her) imaginal (and pictorial) activity (which, in the social and political domain, can bring about various effects). María Noel Lapoujade, the author of *Homo Imaginans*, writes: “The human species is an imaginary species. There is a power of imagination in it. It is the force that determines individual, social, natural life; a force pushing both to creation (art, science, technology) and destruction (gallows, guillotine, crematorium furnaces, wars, the Holocaust).”<sup>22</sup>

## Discrepancies with Nature

In the interpretation of the author of *Tristes Tropiques*, Rousseau never made the same mistake as Denis Diderot, who idealized a natural man. For Diderot, according to Claude Lévi-Strauss, the history of humankind looks like this: “Once there was natural Man. Within that natural Man, an artificial Man was later introduced. Between the two, war broke out, and will go on raging till life comes to an end.”<sup>23</sup> According to Lévi-Strauss, the concept of constant antagonism between “natural man” and “artificial man” is *de facto* an absurd approach. “Whoever says ‘Man,’ says ‘Language,’ and whoever says ‘Language,’ says ‘Society.’”<sup>24</sup> Such key identifications for structuralism could be expressed as follows: the concept of the natural man is highly problematic because it implies the possibility of assigning the name of a human to a being who has formed outside any social environment, which is a symbolic-linguistic universe. Undoubtedly, we find such a perspective already in the thought of Aristotle, who defined a human being as a *zoon politikon* and emphasized his linguistic character.<sup>25</sup>

However, the question of the relationship between “natural man” and “artificial man” in the light of the contexts discussed by Diderot and Rousseau is not entirely

<sup>19</sup> S. Pufendorf, *On the Duty of Man and Citizen According to Natural Law*, transl. M. Silverthorne, Cambridge 1991.

<sup>20</sup> Ch. Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries*, Durham 2004; J.J. Wunenburger, *Filozofia obrazów*, transl. T. Stróżyński, Gdańsk 2011.

<sup>21</sup> H. Belting, *An Anthropology of Images: Picture, Medium, Body*, transl. T. Dunlap, Princeton-Oxford 2014.

<sup>22</sup> M.N. Lapoujade, *Homo Imaginans II*, Mexico 2017, p. 17.

<sup>23</sup> C. Lévi-Strauss, *Tristes Tropiques*, transl. J. Russell, New York 1961, pp. 338–339.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 339.

<sup>25</sup> Aristotle, *The Politics and The Constitution of Athens*, S. Everson (ed.), transl. J. Barnes, J.M. Moore, Cambridge-New York 1996, p. 13.

unambiguous. Bougainville's Polynesians, Diderot writes, live in a society that seems to be much more perfect than European societies. Bougainville appears in the assessment of the old man representing the people of Tahiti as a "criminal," a "leader of robbers," a "poisoner of nations" who tried to erase in their souls the voice of nature to which they obey.<sup>26</sup> It is a vision of a state of nature in which everyone lives in harmony in a community that includes natural goods and women, performs moderate work together to meet biological needs, has no property, no laws, and no government. As Diderot states, a Tahitian is a "newborn child" compared to a European who is already a "decrepit old man." However, in addition to such elements of the quasi-communist social utopia built on the images of travel literature, we find in Diderot a different approach to the state of nature. It is a state of "the primordial inequality of forces and talents, the struggle of the strong with the weak, when man lived in a herd, close to the animal and struggled to satisfy the elementary necessities of life."<sup>27</sup> Diderot, according to Skrzypek, advocated an intermediate state, that is, a concept between the conception of the state of nature as "primordial innocence" (which he quite rightly did not attribute to Rousseau's thought) and the capture of this state in the Hobbesian categories of struggle and antagonism. A human being is a social being — the establishment of social organization is necessary to oppose nature in the struggle to satisfy material needs — but not everything good comes from society (just as not everything bad should be identified with the state of nature). Existence in society brings certain "misdeeds," but it is also a source of "improvements and virtues."

Rousseau, as Lévi-Strauss and Bronisław Baczko note, uses a certain theoretical model, that is, an image of the state of nature, in the light of which it becomes possible to critically judge the existing society and the relations prevailing in it, as well as to correct them. This model, as he notes in *Emile*, determines the "scale" to which "measurements" are to be referred, that is, empirical data (for example, laws, historical facts, customs, social relations, etc.). The confrontation of the existing state with this model makes it possible to understand why the "artificial man" (historical and socialized) makes everything good "degenerate." Rousseau writes:

everything degenerates in the hands of man. He forces one soil to nourish the products of another, one tree to bear the fruit of another. He mixes and confuses the climates, the elements, the seasons. He mutilates his dog, his horse, his slave. He turns everything upside down; he disfigures everything; he loves deformity, monsters. He wants nothing as nature made it, not even man; for him, man must be trained like a school horse; man must be fashioned in keeping with his fancy like a tree in his garden.<sup>28</sup>

"Were he not to do this, however, everything would go even worse, and our species does not admit of being formed halfway"<sup>29</sup> — the process of socialization and denaturing is a *de facto* inevitable process. Socialization lies, as Rousseau emphasizes, in our nature, and the activation of this process primarily disturbs the bal-

<sup>26</sup> D. Diderot, *Supplément au voyage de Bougainville ou Dialogue entre A. et B. sur l'inconvénient d'attacher des idées morales à certaines actions physiques qui n'en comportent pas*, 1772, p. 14, <https://archive.org/details/supplementauvoya0000dide> (accessed: 23.06.2022).

<sup>27</sup> M. Skrzypek, *Diderot*, Warszawa 1982, p. 225.

<sup>28</sup> J.J. Rousseau, *Emile, or, On Education*, transl. A. Bloom, New York 1979, p. 37.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibidem*.

ance between human beings and the natural world. The growing dominance over the natural world is inextricably connected to the invention of tools, the division of labour, changes in the ways of production, private property, and social inequality. Returning to the state of nature is impossible (because a human being has gone far in the process of socialization) and, more importantly, undesirable. For only in society can a human being be virtuous — the concept of virtue, like the concept of misdeed, are social constructs. Moreover, in the last passages of his *A Dissertation on the Origin and Foundation of the Inequality of Mankind*, Rousseau compares the “last stage of inequality” of existing society to the “initial state of nature,” in which the “law of the strongest” prevails.<sup>30</sup>

The state of nature is not only a theoretical model, but can also be recreated in individual experience, and especially through emotional contact with the natural world (this longing for the state of nature, as Baczkowski points out, fits in with the thesis about the impossibility of returning). It seems that in both the first and the second case we are dealing with an imaginary state of nature. The image of nature appears as a “nihilation” (*la néantisation*) of existing relations. It should be added that “an image is not purely and simply *the world denied*, but always *the world denied from a certain point of view*, precisely that which allows the positing of absence or the nonexistence of the object presentified as ‘imaged.’”<sup>31</sup> In addition, the image in both cases triggers a political and social search for new ways of development and harmonious integration of a human being with society (as a transition from individual rebellion to collective utopia). As Baczkowski emphasizes, “the worldview of Jean-Jacques is programmatically limited to anthropology,” but it is strictly political.<sup>32</sup> The inconsistencies between the imagined state of nature and the existing order are politically corrected. The political heirs will interpret Rousseau in a revolutionary way: revolutionary regeneration during the French Revolution — both moral and physical as well spontaneous and state-administered, treated once as a “miracle,” once as a “task” — shapes a new human being. The drama of humankind most often appears as a “secularized anthropology of the fall,” and the vision of the new human being (manifested in the revolutionary imaginarium) means a return to the mythical state of “original innocence.” At the time of the Bolshevik Revolution, both the ideological philistine depicted by Mayakovsky and *homo sovieticus* produced by the totalitarian regime become a grotesque caricature of the new human being. This new human will appear today on the horizon of transhumanist utopias or dystopias.

At this point, it would be necessary to touch on a few threads related to the state of nature, in which human lives in harmony with the natural world. As has been said, according to Rousseau, the domination over the natural world, inextricably linked to the process of socialization, produced undesirable effects from the anthropological and social point of view. Discourses on the domination

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<sup>30</sup> B. Baczkowski, *Rousseau. Samotność i wspólnota*, Gdańsk 2009, p. 139.

<sup>31</sup> J.-P. Sartre, *The Imaginary: A Phenomenological Psychology of the Imagination*, transl. J. Webber, London-New York 2004, pp. 184–185.

<sup>32</sup> B. Baczkowski, *Rousseau*, p. 278.



over nature were associated with its instrumental constitution, which from the 18th century meant primarily its mass and organized transformation (for example, modernized agriculture and industry) for the benefit of human beings. At the same time, “wild” fragments of nature began to be identified with the margins of industrial society.<sup>33</sup> This can be seen, among others, in the 19th-century myths about the virgin nature of America as the Garden of the World, the primordial Wilderness, Paradise, Nature seen through the eyes of God.<sup>34</sup> Both of these constructs of the natural world transform nature into an object for consumption. It is either an area of capitalist exploitation or a “scenery, landscape, image, fresh air” — a site of “visual consumption.”<sup>35</sup> In this sense, it would be necessary to ask about a possible future of nature and a human being in the globalisation era, as well as the real meaning of the idea of the “return to nature” appearing in ecological argumentation. “Whether such intense global processes will facilitate or impede a reasonable environment for ‘in-humans’ (such as cyborgs) and ‘in-animals’ (such as carnivorous cows) in the next century is a question of inestimable significance and awesome indeterminacy.”<sup>36</sup>

## Human Masks

The meaning of the mask in anthropological approaches has a specifically human character. As Manfred Lurker notes, wearing masks should be considered as “an attempt to transcend from the subjective world into the objective world or to use its forces. In this way, masks end up in religious beliefs and cultural customs, but also in superstitions.”<sup>37</sup> Certainly, it is a truism to say that the domain of contemporary politics is an area of permanent stylization, delusion, creation of deceptive images. Here, the mask — understood as a media-image artefact designed to protect against exposing the face — is the most important of the political accessories. As is well known, Niccolò Machiavelli as a supporter of the “mask regime”<sup>38</sup> claimed that success in the political domain consists of a constant effort to “hide and pretend of a certain nature.” The ruler “should imitate both the fox and the lion, for the lion is liable to be trapped, whereas the fox cannot ward off wolves. One needs, then, to be a fox to recognise traps, and the lion to frighten away wolves.”<sup>39</sup> In the case of political praxis, praxis cannot be otherwise, for it is always necessary to admit the possibility that the defects of human nature — implying destructive tendencies — will be revealed. Of course, this mask can be a mask that

<sup>33</sup> P. Macnaghten, J. Urry, *Contested Natures*, London 1998.

<sup>34</sup> B. Novak, *American Painting of the Nineteenth Century: Realism, Idealism, and the American Experience*, New York 1969.

<sup>35</sup> P. Macnaghten, J. Urry, *Contested Natures*, p. 111.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 276.

<sup>37</sup> M. Lurker, *Przesłanie symboli w mitach, kulturach i religiach*, transl. R. Wojnakowski, Warszawa 2011, p. 319.

<sup>38</sup> S. Filipowicz, *Twarz i maska*, Kraków 1998.

<sup>39</sup> N. Machiavelli, *The Prince*, Q. Skinner, R. Price (eds.), Cambridge-New York 1988, p. 61.



is exceedingly “human.” At least from the time of Machiavelli and Prince Valentino politics has a problem with the mask and face of a human being.

In the unfinished poem *Golden Ass*, referring to the text of Apuleius’ *Metamorphosis or The Golden Ass*, Machiavelli describes the transformation of natures — it is nothing more than the donning of a mask, the strategy of the “chameleon”: “the hero of the *Golden Ass* throws off human nature in order to reveal himself in the counter-nature of the animal, but this turns out to be the same disguise, the same mask of being as the original nature.”<sup>40</sup> In this case, the nature loses its permanent ontological anchorage — everything seems to transform, flow and change, arise and disappear. The nature becomes a mask, a disguise — or even an artefact. On this foundation, Machiavelli creates an ontology of political action, “opposing all concepts that allow us to treat the world as a given, existing order.”<sup>41</sup> After Machiavelli, in the 17th century, “concepts begin to take shape, which we will find in various incarnations and in the age of the Enlightenment, and later — in the twentieth century [...] it is a question of replacing metaphysics, which refers to unwavering foundations, with inquiries showing human actions as a field of interaction, which is at the same time a kind of evocation of reality.”<sup>42</sup> Although Rousseau postulates a critical distance from the artificial world of appearances (“external” culture and “external” self) through individual experience recreating the state of nature, transformations of the public sphere strengthen the spectacular character of social life and politics. The 18th century, as well as the period of the French Revolution, present the social space of mutual contacts as a stage on which a human (or a revolutionary people) is both an actor and a spectator. In this case, the function of the mask and the spectacle as tools shaping opinion and establishing identity plays a very important role. It can be seen, for example, in the *procession générale* as a symbolic representation of the social hierarchy,<sup>43</sup> or during revolutionary celebrations, in which the people were the actor, the spectator and the “greatest ornament.” Last but not least, the decapitation was also a revolutionary spectacle.

Joseph Addison’s *The Spectator* was one of the most important media of the Enlightenment audience. Addison, “worked toward the spread of tolerance, the emancipation of civil morality from moral theology and of practical wisdom from the philosophy of the scholars. The public that read and debated this sort of things read and debated about itself.”<sup>44</sup> “Enlightenment anthropology — as S. Filipowicz writes — exposes the motif of the spectator.”<sup>45</sup> In the anthropological perspective, a human being as a spectator and observer constitutes his (or her) social figure by looking at himself (or herself) through the eyes of a companion-mentor.

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<sup>40</sup> S. Wróbel, *Lektury retroaktywne. Rodowody współczesnej myśli filozoficznej*, Kraków 2014, p. 216.

<sup>41</sup> S. Filipowicz, *Twarz i maska*, p. 24.

<sup>42</sup> Ibidem, p. 31.

<sup>43</sup> R. Darnton, *The Great Cat Massacre: And Other Episodes in French Cultural History*, London 1984.

<sup>44</sup> J. Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, transl. T. Burger, Cambridge 1989, p. 43.

<sup>45</sup> S. Filipowicz, *Twarz i maska*, p. 59.

A human being is therefore a project, the creator of his (or her) identity, which is carried out not so much according to a religious model or is given through tradition, but is a rationally oriented performance of a specific role under the evaluative gaze of the Other. In this sense, referring to the sociological concept of a social actor, one could say:

The self, then, as a performed character, is not an organic thing that has a specific location, whose fundamental fate is to be born, to mature, and to die; it is a dramatic effect arising diffusely from a scene that is presented, and the characteristic issue, the crucial concern, is whether it will be credited or discredited.<sup>46</sup>

The Enlightenment anthropology, which defines a human being as a subject who shapes life according to the rules of reason, is criticized in the 20th century. The perspective of public participation of rational actors (and viewers) is based on the traditional concept of the subject: the rational ego recognizes its position in the world, in the orders of objects, which — according to the dictates of autonomous reason — it shapes. The “death of the subject” proclaimed by the structuralists questioned the vision of a human being as a subject who is an autonomous source of meaning:<sup>47</sup> The subject turns out to be one of the elements within the structured symbolic and linguistic universe. A human being, as Foucault writes, always discovers themselves in connection with the existing (and discursively structured) world:

when he tries to define himself as a living being, he can uncover his own beginning only against the background of a life which itself began long before him; when he attempts to re-apprehend himself as a labouring being, he cannot bring even the most rudimentary forms of such a being to light except within a human time and space which have been previously institutionalized, and previously subjugated by society; and when he attempts to define his essence as a speaking subject, prior to any effectively constituted language, and not the stumbling sound, the first word upon the basis of which all languages or even language itself become possible.<sup>48</sup>

As we know, Foucault’s attention is directed towards various discourses that create a human “being in the world,” which closely overlaps with his thesis about the productive nature of power. Thus, it turns out that society produces anthropological imperatives strictly regulating models of being. The Enlightenment belief in reason shows its dark, totalitarian side: “the supremacy of reason means the multiplication of the power of plan, rigour, the procedure.”<sup>49</sup> The masks of our social being (*de facto* the only signs of our social identity) are constellations of rules and modes of action imposed by power-knowledge. Paul Veyne, writing about Foucault’s thought, emphasized that it is necessary to “put an end to the idea that the subject, the Ego, would exist before its roles, because there is no subject ‘in the state of nature’ (*à l’état sauvage*), prior to the process of subjectivization:

<sup>46</sup> E. Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, New York 1959, pp. 252–253.

<sup>47</sup> E. Laclau, “Discourse,” [in:] *A Companion to Contemporary Political Philosophy*, vol. 1, R.E. Goodin, P. Pettit, T. Pogge (eds.), Oxford 2007, pp. 541–547.

<sup>48</sup> M. Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*, New York 1970, p. 330.

<sup>49</sup> S. Filipowicz, *Twarz i maska*, p. 65.

such a subject would not be primary, but empty. Nowhere in history will we find a universal form of the pure subject.”<sup>50</sup>

At the same time, the evaluative view of the Other is transposed and hyperbolized in Foucault’s thought — the individual or group primacy is transformed into a panoptic machine of permanent control. Society is no longer only a society of the spectacle, but, first of all, a society of surveillance.

Is it possible to speak here of the emancipation of such a subject? If we assume, as Laclau did,<sup>51</sup> that emancipation presupposes the pre-existence of what is to be emancipated (emancipation as such is therefore not an act of creation, but rather the liberation of what ontologically precedes the act of liberation itself), then in the perspective outlined by Foucault such a form of emancipation cannot take place. As has been said, Foucault does not accept an optic that assumes the existence of a human subjectivity that precedes the process of socialization. It seems therefore that, in this perspective, the way to escape from the mask regime is not through emancipatory self-styling. Could it be “madness”? After all, even if it is a form of escape from the socially enforced convention, shape and rules of the mask, it is recognized, ordered and organized by the prevailing order of discourse.

## A Restrained Catastrophe?

“Stories about the beginnings — as Rüdiger Safranski writes — are myths, while in more recent epochs they are theoretical explanations of very suggestive cognitive value.”<sup>52</sup> One of such mythical stories is the ancient Egyptian story about the god of the atmosphere Shu propping the vault of the heaven with his own body. “The god of the air, Shu, separates heaven (Nut) and earth (Geb), a symbolic act denoting a consciousness of up and down, light and darkness, good and evil.”<sup>53</sup> In this way, the world order is a fragile balance between heaven and earth — or, as one might say, “a restrained catastrophe.” Therefore, “Shu should be handled with care, otherwise, the god can make everything break down.”<sup>54</sup> Interestingly, this god, as a force establishing and sustaining the world as a (relatively) stable whole, was at the same time considered to be the personification of the state. A few centuries later, thanks to Hesiod’s theogony, the Greeks gained insight into the chaos of the primaeval beginning — a time of violence, murder, and incest — that might again show its destructive face if the gods invade the human world after the fall of heaven.

Myths speak variously about the history of the world, a human being and the human condition, but the motives of the fall (for example, Hesiod and the history of humankind, Plato and the murder of the “divine shepherd”), death and suffering (old age, illness, birth pains, insanity, vices and passions) are constant. Moreover,

<sup>50</sup> P. Veyne, *Foucault. Sa pensée, sa personne*, Paris 2008, p. 134.

<sup>51</sup> E. Laclau, “Beyond Emancipation,” *Development and Change* 23 (1992), pp. 121–137.

<sup>52</sup> R. Safranski, *Zło. Dramat wolności*, transl I. Kania, Warszawa 1999, p. 9.

<sup>53</sup> M. Lurker, *The Gods and Symbols of Ancient Egypt: An Illustrated Dictionary*, New York 1980, p. 9.

<sup>54</sup> R. Safranski, *Zło*, p. 9.

a human being, fleeing from his or her bloody and cruel beginnings, constantly carries them within himself or herself, even when he or she is a socialized human being. A mythical example of a pre-social nature, wild and untamed, not respecting laws and not recognizing supreme moral values — in fact, it is a human being pursuing his or her own selfish interests that are dangerous to others — was Polyphemus, who, contrary to the accepted principles of hospitality, imprisoned and then devoured several of Odysseus' companions. "A very significant point in the myth of the Cyclops is that he does not belong to any community, because he inhabits his cave *alone*."<sup>55</sup> It would seem that the "socialized" and rational Odysseus will not go so far as to commit the cruelty of irrational affect — and yet the returning of Odysseus, who himself suffered so much, arranges a bloodbath for suitors, which could trigger off a further continuation of murders (here Zeus had to erase the memory of the dead to stop further violence). As we see, in "Greek mythology, people break away from their origins, just as man escapes from a catastrophe. But they break away from them in yet another sense: they carry them with them and cause them themselves."<sup>56</sup> Returning to the story of Polyphemus: the mutual care and cooperation of Odysseus and his companions have their dark side in the form of brutal violence (the burning off Polyphemus' eye), thanks to which they escape from the threat.

In the context of the two mutually exclusive social visions indicated at the beginning of the text, it can be said that even if each of the political theories (as well as specific, particular political practices) seek to regain or constitute social existence as a harmonious and non-antagonistic whole, such aspirations are ultimately always doomed to failure due to the "leaven of perdition" inherent in human (identified, for example, with evil human nature, or — to put it a bit cautiously — its egoistic and conflictual side). In this perspective, order, law, state, or culture are permanently threatened because they are constantly accompanied by their potentially active opposite: regression to an anarchic state of nature. Perhaps the state-legal order is nothing more than a civil war "which can only be prevented by the overarching might of the state, or the leviathan."<sup>57</sup> It is worth adding that the category of "order" in political life takes the form of an "empty signifier."<sup>58</sup> Laclau brings closer the situation of radical disorder, which is not far from the Hobbesian state of nature. Then people need "some order," and its actual content becomes a secondary matter (various political forces will seek to present their particular goals as the fulfilment of missing order). For Hobbes, however, the political universe must be filled once and for all with the will of the sovereign, Leviathan, the "mortal god," and there is no room for a democratic confrontation between the various particularisms offering their vision of the social order. Leviathan masters the chaos located in the fighting individuals and social groups. As Schmitt writes, "one

<sup>55</sup> A. Chmielewski, *Spółczesność otwarte czy wspólnota?*, p. 61.

<sup>56</sup> R. Safranski, *Złoto*, p. 13.

<sup>57</sup> C. Schmitt, *The Leviathan in the State Theory of Thomas Hobbes*, p. 21.

<sup>58</sup> E. Laclau, "Why Do Empty Signifiers Matter to Politics?," [in:] E. Laclau, *Emancipation(s)*, London-New York 1996, pp. 37–46.

of the monsters, the leviathan ‘state,’ continuously holds down the other monster, the behemoth ‘revolutionary people.’”<sup>59</sup>

It seems that, contrary to the efforts of the Hobbesian Leviathan, the desire for “difference” — identified by Plato as *thymos* — is a permanent threat to the social contract (Hobbes speaks of pride and self-conceit, Rousseau of *amour-propre*, G.W.F. Hegel of the recognition, and Friedrich Nietzsche of the human as animal with “red cheeks”). In this struggle for recognition, human can strive for domination and violence, but he also puts his life at risk. Hegel, as we know, will interpret this struggle for recognition in terms of the energy and dynamics of the historical process. In fact, a state of a fully reconciled and non-antagonistic society would be the end of the struggle for recognition and a state of “comfortable nihilism.” In this sense, Francis Fukuyama writes about the “last man” and asks a rather important question that casts a shadow over the alleged lack of alternatives to the idea and axiology of the liberal state. “Will man be forever content to be recognized simply as equal of all other men, or will he not demand more in time? And if megalothymia has been so totally sublimated or channeled by modern politics, should we agree with Nietzsche that this is not a cause for celebration, but an unparalleled disaster?”<sup>60</sup> Anti-liberal (and anti-rationalist) discourses — represented, for example, by past and present “occidentalism”<sup>61</sup> — undoubtedly constitute a strong critique of “comfortable nihilism” and spiritual-ideological emptiness. “Neither capitalism nor liberal democracy ever pretended to be a heroic creed. Enemies of the liberal society even think that liberalism celebrates mediocrity. Liberal societies, according to the pre-war German nationalist Arthur Moeller van den Bruck, give everyone the freedom to be a mediocre man.”<sup>62</sup>

Hobbes’s Leviathan, which is a (relatively) effective barrier against the destructive tendencies of human nature is becoming, according to Schmitt’s anti-liberal interpretation, more and more indolent. Leviathan is destroyed from within as a result of the growing dominance of liberal rights and freedoms, individualistic freedom of thought and conscience. And although it remains the machine of modern state organization, it also becomes only a formal, technical and neutral space of competition of heterogeneous political forces. But what about Behemoth? It seems that in the context of the post-political *Zeitgeist* outlined by Slavoj Žižek or Chantal Mouffe one of its significant faces are outbreaks of “excess” violence (in Bauman’s interpretation, they are *de facto* a form of struggle for recognition in conditions of economic and social exclusion). It is about cruelty, which manifests itself in various forms: “from ‘fundamentalist’ racist and/or religious slaughter to the ‘senseless’ outbursts of violence by adolescents and the homeless in our megalopolises.”<sup>63</sup>

It is also worth noting that in the anthropological and political space, Schmitt (like Sigmund Freud) was a supporter of Hobbesian thought. Schmitt, as has al-

<sup>59</sup> C. Schmitt, *The Leviathan in the State Theory of Thomas Hobbes*, p. 21.

<sup>60</sup> F. Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man*, New York 1993, p. 207.

<sup>61</sup> I. Buruma, A. Margalit, *Occidentalism: The West in the Eyes of Its Enemies*, New York 2004.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 71.

<sup>63</sup> S. Žižek, “Carl Schmitt in the Age of Post-Politics,” [in:] *The Challenge of Carl Schmitt*, Ch. Mouffe (ed.), London 1999, p. 31.

ready been said, relates every political theory to the perspective of anthropological recognition: “all genuine political theories presuppose man to be [...] a dangerous and dynamic being.”<sup>64</sup> The German author writes in the spirit of Hobbesian anthropology about the eternally permanent relationship between enemy and friend. It may change its forms and scope, but there will always be concrete groups of people who fight with other groups of people in the name of justice, humanity, order and peace.

## Dialogue or Antagonism?

A completely different response to the tradition of the Enlightenment than that proposed by Foucault is the thought of Jürgen Habermas. There is no pessimistic view of the totalitarian legacy of the Enlightenment project; a view that, in addition to Foucault’s thought, also appears in contexts that emphasize the total disgrace of Enlightenment ideas and humanistic values after the Holocaust. Habermas, therefore, believes that there is a close connection between the democratic ideas of the Enlightenment and its inherent universalist and rationalist perspective. In other words, to challenge this perspective would be a threat to the democratic project.<sup>65</sup> The “postmodern” critique of the Enlightenment ideas of universal human nature, universal reason, or the rational autonomous subject is therefore politically dangerous. Habermas, as is well known, opts for the introduction of a dialogical perspective into liberalism as a necessary supplement — dialogue is not something contingent for liberal society, because it is situated at the very heart of all social bonds.

Before discussing the problem of dialogue and antagonism as two competing political and social perspectives, it is worth emphasizing that they are rooted in certain “beliefs about the nature of human being, the nature of power or possible interpersonal relations.”<sup>66</sup> Leszek Koczanowicz mentions the formation of these competing options in reference to the emergence of the “modern moral order” described by Charles Taylor. It is primarily about the tension between liberal individualism and non-liberal forms of community. As Adam Chmielewski writes, liberal politics can be defined as “striving to tame the antinomicity of social life, based on awareness and recognition of differences and social identities,” as well as “prudent negotiation of acceptable ways of coexistence of distinct individual and group identities.” On the other hand, a “communitarian” politics would therefore be a politics of “*picking up and emphasizing the differences* between one, ‘our’ community, and ‘others,’ ‘the enemies,’ of the community, which at the same time is *accompanied by the desire to eliminate differences within one’s community*.”<sup>67</sup>

<sup>64</sup> J.W. Bendersky, “Hobbesian Anthropology, the Interminable Enemy, and State Theory: Intellectual Convergences in Carl Schmitt and Sigmund Freud,” *Studia Philosophica Wratislaviensia* Supplementary Volume, English Edition (2012), p. 145.

<sup>65</sup> Ch. Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox*, London-New York 2000, p. 17.

<sup>66</sup> L. Koczanowicz, “Dialog i antagonizm,” [in:] *Filozofa polityki współczesnie*, J. Zdybel, L. Zdybel (eds.), Kraków 2013, p. 117.

<sup>67</sup> A. Chmielewski, *Spółczesność otwarte czy wspólnota?*, p. 27.

Taylor shows, in reference to the concepts of Grotius and Locke, that certain decisions about human nature imply ideas about the nature of social coexistence. It is worth to dwell upon this thought for a moment. In Grotius, the law of nature, which is above all concern for the preservation of society, is connected with the immutable features of human nature (which can be deduced from the *a priori* cognition made by *ratio recta*). The nature is equipped with the social drive, that is, the drive for peaceful and organized coexistence with others. As Taylor argues, starting from the 17th century, the ideas initiated by Grotius gradually began to prevail in our theoretical thinking about the normative foundations of social life and how we imagine social life and interpersonal relations (the so-called modern social imaginaries). Idealization of the benefits of the mutual provision of services (by providing security, exchanging goods and providing prosperity to meet the needs of “ordinary life”); defending the rights of individuals, including the most important right to freedom; the conviction that freedoms and rights must be vested in all members of the community — these are the most important features of the modern idea of the moral order derived from the paradigm coined by Grotius and then by Locke. The author of *Two Treatises on Civil Government* believes that a rational and hardworking man, acting in an orderly, peaceful and productive way, carries out the will of God in the world. “He gave it to use of the industrious and rational (and the labour was to be his title to it) not to the fancy or covetousness of quarrelsome and contentious” — Locke argues.<sup>68</sup> Taylor notes that the modern social imaginary privileges the individualistic perspective and calls into question the traditional, communal forms of social complementarity. Therefore, it will emphasize the need to create a new social order as a substitute for the lost sense of community. At the same time, he shows that in the context of social poverty and insecurity, the rules and regulations of the communal forms of social life were the only guarantees of survival — in this sense, modern individualism seemed to be simply a luxury or a dangerous weakness.

The liberal tradition — which identifies a human being primarily in an individualistic and rationalist perspective — is formed today, as Mouffe shows, within the framework of the “economic” or “ethical” paradigm. In the former, sometimes called “aggregative” paradigm, politics is conceived as the “establishment of compromise between competing forces of society. Individuals are portrayed as rational beings, driven by the maximization of their own interests and as acting in the political world in a basically instrumental way.” The second paradigm, the “deliberative” one, is a dialogical perspective: “aims at creating a link between morality and politics. It advocates want to replace instrumental rationality by communicative rationality.”<sup>69</sup> In other words, according to the proponents of this model, and the most recognizable of them is Habermas, the political debate as a particular area of application of morality makes it possible to achieve a rational and moral consensus thanks to a dialogue without exclusions. This means that political disputes that determine important issues of social life can be resolved in a way that would satisfy

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<sup>68</sup> J. Locke, *Two Treatises on Civil Government*, London 1884, p. 207.

<sup>69</sup> Ch. Mouffe, *On the Political*, London-New York 2005, pp. 12–13.



all parties involved in the dialogue. Liberal politics formed according to the above model is a universalist-rationalist vision of how the social coexistence of people should be shaped. Dialogue is what — in the normative sense — should be chosen by all rational individuals in the political disputes they engage in.

The thought of the already mentioned Schmitt, as well as its contemporary reinterpretations, challenge the dialogical proposal related to the ideas of liberalism. Schmitt's vision, as we know, was far from "deliberative" approaches to the political. The idea of a democratic community proposed by the German author excluded all liberal pluralism and individualism. According to Schmitt, the moment of establishing antagonistic boundaries between "us" (that is, those who belong to the common substance of *demos*) and "them" (that is, those who, for one reason or another, cannot belong to it) is constitutive of the democratic order. The political configuration of the *demos* vis-a-vis the external enemy implies the elimination of differences within the democratic community. This dialectic of the enemy as a "negative otherness" and at the same time a "constitutive otherness" for our identity is visible both in Freud's anthropological approaches and in (post)structuralist approaches. Plessner, writing about the friend-enemy relationship, also stressed that it simply belongs to the "constitution of man" understood as "an open question or as a power."<sup>70</sup> In Schmitt's view, the political space is therefore not a space of conversation or dialogue, but an extremely antagonistic confrontation of collective identities, which may ultimately lead to the physical elimination of one of the parties to the conflict. Referring to Schmitt and at the same time arguing with him, Mouffe will push for the project of agonistic democracy as a practice sublimating the antagonism that is the source of every political order. Apart from direct references to specific decisions in the room of political anthropology, many contemporary concepts question the dialogical model. As Michael Walzer and Mouffe show, for example, the basis for the political legitimacy of one or another decision and action in the political and social domain is not founded on dialogue, openness and the pursuit of understanding, but on active identifications, collective imaginations and passions.

Dialogue or antagonism? Is it possible to resolve disputes in a way that is satisfactory for everyone?; or are we doomed to impose our position on the rest of the society, and thus to a constant conflict and struggle that shatters the social community? Regardless of whether we choose an inclusive or exclusivist perspective, we are confronted here with "the most persistent thread of political reflection of human kind." The desire for politics to take place in a dialogical and moral register — that is, the desire to regulate social life to make it predictable, safe and — one can say — "friendly" — is as old as the desire to the contrary. It is the desire to control others in order to realize "one's own, selfish and in this sense 'antisocial' interests."<sup>71</sup>

<sup>70</sup> H. Plessner, *Władza a natura ludzka*, p. 68.

<sup>71</sup> A. Chmielewski, *Spółczeństwo otwarte czy wspólnota?*, p. 60.

## Further Research Perspectives

It can be said that people have always been a question for themselves. The position of the humans to themselves, to nature and to the principles of being together, is reflected in myths, art, religions, science and philosophy. According to Immanuel Kant, anthropological reflection is crucial. Kant speaks of anthropology as a discipline that is ontological, epistemological, and moral-political. In other words, anthropological reflection is an attempt at a theoretical (and practical) attitude of the people to themselves and the world — the natural reality and the one created. Thus, there is a close connection between anthropological decisions and the sphere of politics and various ideas, principles or visions of the arrangement of the social world. The proposed interpretations of the thoughts of Hobbes, Machiavelli, or Rousseau had the character of “retroactive reading.”<sup>72</sup> It means that the references made to historical-philosophical examples were to activate the contexts of contemporary thought, or even give them new meanings, and at the same time trigger a thought that leans towards the future.

Therefore, at this point, it is worth at least signalling some possible paths of further reflection, which would be complementary to them. If we recognize that the sphere of politics is closely rooted in our being and the human constitution (“politics is our destiny,” Plessner writes<sup>73</sup>), then, above all, the question arises about the nature of our current and future political practices, as well as future proposals for social being together. This is important for many reasons. The climate crisis, progressive instrumentalization of nature, migration crises, problems of liberal eugenics, transhumanist ideas — these are certainly problems that call into question the very “future of human nature,” as Habermas says. Another possible clue, largely related to the above issues, points to the question of our being in harmony with nature (understood as *physis*). The normative way of understanding nature is, as Lothar Schäfer writes, the idea of “always captivating.”<sup>74</sup> One could mention various theories and practices of healthy eating, lifestyle, concepts of natural social and political orders, or natural laws and natural morality. *De facto* normative implications were already functioning in Greek contexts in various fields (for example, medicine; concepts of living within the socio-political community; ways of living outside of social conventions and culture). Various efflorescences of naturalism — understood as a justification of the prevailing or desirable relations of power, the organization of social life — can be found in political ideas and practices referring to the relations prevailing in nature (which this work has signalled). Currently, “return to nature” and “compatibility with nature” seems to be one of the main slogans of ecological argumentation. One can ask about the nature of this compatibility, as well as about the paths leading to it in the societies of late capitalism, in which the relationship between human being and nature has

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<sup>72</sup> S. Wróbel, *Lektury retroaktywne*.

<sup>73</sup> H. Plessner, *Władza a natura ludzka*, p. 69.

<sup>74</sup> L. Schäfer, “Przyroda,” [in:] *Filozofia. Podstawowe pytania*, E. Martens, M. Schmedelbach (eds.), transl. K. Krzemieniowa, Warszawa 1995, p. 518.

been commercialized. In this context doesn't a "return to nature" simply mean its consumerist assimilation in the form of discursively organized "leisure spaces"? is it not the consumption of "natural phenomena such as sun, sea, snow?"<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> P. Macnaghten, J. Urry, *Contested Natures*, p. 105.

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