

PHILOSOPHICAL ASPECTS OF MODERNITY ACCORDING TO LESZEK KOŁAKOWSKI. PROLEGOMENA

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Purpose: The aim of this article is a philosophical analysis of the condition of the contemporary human being in the context of modernism and postmodernism, with particular focus on the works of Leszek Kołakowski. In his writings, Kołakowski addresses key issues of freedom, individual identity, and meaning in the face of changing cultural paradigms. His reflections on the impact of political and intellectual systems on the individual reveal a deep concern for individual freedom within the context of dominant ideologies.

Methodology: The publication is theoretical in nature and is based on a literature review. The applied method allowed for the analysis of the current state of knowledge regarding the concepts related to the discussed issues. This not only enabled the definition of the scope of the discussion but also highlighted areas requiring further research. The analysis suggests possible directions for future studies and formulates open questions that may serve as a starting point for deeper reflection in subsequent works.

Findings: The publication highlights key issues related to the impact of modernism and postmodernism on the condition of the contemporary human being. It discusses the influence of these concepts on the process of shaping individual identity and subjectivity in the context of changing paradigms, the shift in the approach to issues of truth, identity, and power, the need for a balance between individual freedom and social structure, as well as the consequences of social responsibility in the context of individual freedom.

Social consequences: Both concepts have a crucial impact on the status of the individual and the quality of democracy. In a world where technology increasingly dominates human values, the lack of balance between these currents and the necessity of protecting human rights and the community can lead to the weakening of individual subjectivity and the deterioration of democratic standards. As a result, this may lead to the erosion of the foundations of democracy and an increase in the alienation of the individual in the face of technological and ideological dominance.

Originality: The publication attempts to analyze contemporary existential crises in the context of epistemological transformations that began in modernity and intensified in postmodernism. It offers a critical assessment of these processes, while also highlighting their mutual interpenetration and impact on contemporary culture and society.

Keywords: modernity, postmodernity, technology, freedom, democracy, autonomy, rationalism, relativism, technocracy, subjectivity.

Category of the paper: conceptual paper, viewpoint.

Introduction

The contemporary crisis of humanity, understood as a crisis of the human subject, manifests itself in the erosion of stable identity, axiological relativism, and dehumanization caused by the instrumentalization of the individual. From the perspective of modernity and postmodernism, this crisis evolves from the promise of the emancipation of reason to the deconstruction of all ontological narratives. Modernity, rooted in the Enlightenment concept of anthropocentrism, in its classical form constructs the human being as an autonomous, rational creator of history, striving for universal progress achieved through science and technology. The crisis reveals itself in the paradox of this vision: belief in linear development leads to mental enslavement under a totalitarian mindset, where the individual is reduced to a function within an ideological or economic machine. This is manifested today in technocratism, where the human being becomes a tool for optimization, subordinated to the logic of efficiency, leading to the loss of both freedom and identity (Bauman, 2006). Postmodernism, in turn, announces the "death of the subject" and grand narratives, questioning objective truth and, to some extent, invalidating its epistemological legitimacy, which once guaranteed the clarity of communicative intersubjectivity. This, in consequence, represents a kind of deconstruction of the humanistic foundations that once created a coherent ontological project (Lyotard, 1997). As a result of the influence of both narratives, the outcome is ethical relativism, fragmentation of identity, and a culture of simulacra, where values are contextually constructed, and consumerist egoism replaces the communal *telos*. Today, this manifests itself in identity politics, cultural divisions, media hyperreality, and moral nihilism, deepening alienation towards global capital, thus disconnecting the individual from authentic bonds, turning them into a cog in the global system, where the consumption of simulacra masks exploitation, amplifying loneliness and meaninglessness in the neoliberal world (Baudrillard, 2009). In this new reality, humanity faces the challenge of regaining authenticity and meaning, which can only be possible through the reconstruction of communal bonds. These bonds counteract the alienation of the individual and create space for reflection on the full potential of human subjectivity. In a globalized world, a person can find their place through constructive discourse that fosters mutual understanding, acknowledges differences, and builds a shared space for dialogue. Such a process becomes an essential counterbalance to technocratic instrumentalization, offering a space for reflection on the ontological foundations of human existence.

Cogito ergo sum

Leszek Kołakowski identifies the contemporary crisis of human nature as a profound alienation of man from an indifferent world, the loss of metaphysical meaning, and the destruction of humanistic foundations, an existential crisis resulting from the dominance and entrenchment of extreme rationalism in modernism and relativism in postmodernism. Kołakowski emphasizes the experience of “indifference”, understood as a specific foreignness of the external world to human needs. Although man possesses reason, he feels estranged, incapable of fully taming reality. This leads to a constant striving for myths and triggers an existential anxiety in man, revealing the need to ascribe meaning to reality through symbolic constructs, such as “guarantors of meaning” like religion, history, or progress, which ultimately prove to be illusions (Kołakowski, 1994). As a result, the human being loses the coherence of their identity, becoming a slave to their own illusions or relativistic irony. In Kołakowski's philosophical analysis, the ontological-axiological crisis of contemporary humanism manifests as a consequence of adopting Cartesian *cogito*, Enlightenment rationalism, and logical empiricism, (Kołakowski, 2005). These epistemological paradigms constitute the methodological-axiological core of Western European cultural identity, manifesting through the primacy of reason, the destruction of the authority of tradition, and the reduction of the religious dimension of existence, thereby determining the hierarchy of values in the modern era. Kołakowski is far from adopting an affirmative stance towards the values of technocratic culture, within which knowledge is legitimized not as an autonomous and autotelic activity aimed at discovering the meaning of existence, but as a tool subordinated to the rationale of practically transforming reality (Kołakowski, 2000). This process is carried out based on a specific concept of science, understood as a form of knowledge that abstracts from historical and psychological conditions, while systematically eliminating the axiological dimension from the description and interpretation of reality: “One is allowed to adopt such a stance, but one must not claim that it is anything other than a stance, that is, a certain evaluative perspective in which we place our surroundings; one must not, in particular, claim - this would contradict other fundamental assumptions of the positivist program - that there are non-relativistic values hidden within this stance, something that is valuable independently of human history, the state of needs, psychological dispositions, or arbitrary (in the logical sense of the word) decisions” (Kołakowski, 1966, p. 219). Revealing the threats to the status of contemporary man within the culture and social world, the philosopher undertakes an analysis of negative phenomena characteristic of both the modernist era and the postmodernist era, which stands in opposition to it as a critical reaction to the cult of modernity. Postmodernism, by particularly highlighting the ideas of pluralism, multiculturalism, and tolerance, shapes a paradigm of thinking that, despite its declared openness, leads to questioning the existence of universal and objective cognitive rules. The relativization of the criteria of knowledge and the undermining of the

possibility of establishing a universal concept of truth weaken the epistemological foundations of science, and consequently lead to the erosion of the authority of knowledge. In this sense, the postmodern affirmation of the multiplicity of perspectives and the equality of narratives not only abolishes the cognitive hierarchy but also creates space for radical relativism, in which truth loses its normative character and is reduced to a cultural or discursive construct, especially since: “If there are no universal human cognitive criteria, the only possible solution is to establish the validity of science through terror” (Kołakowski, 2009, p. 266). Postmodernism can be understood as an attempt to critically revise existing ways of perceiving and interpreting reality. It adopts an anti-rational approach to truth, manifested through randomness, discontinuity, disintegration, and the indeterminacy of the cognitive perspective. As a result of this approach to reality, the objectively formulated certainty based on universal principles and norms regulating human knowledge and action is called into question: “Husserl was convinced that the search for certainty is constitutive of European culture and that abandoning this search would be tantamount to the annihilation of that culture” (Kołakowski, 1991, p. 10). In postmodern thought, there is thus a rejection of the classical philosophical tradition, for which self-reflective consciousness is a fundamental instrument of the hermeneutics of reality and the recognition of the existential condition of the human being: “For quite some time, German thinkers have been teaching us that the human species has a natural “hermeneutic” tendency: that in everything it experiences, it almost instinctively seeks meaning” (Kołakowski, 2012, p. 133). The postmodern critique of the hierarchy of values in European culture shapes the meaning of human reality by emphasizing the “otherness” and “difference” of the world, (Rorty, 2009). The attempt to establish a universal ideal of values highlights the fragility of any certainty, indicating that claims to axiological stability are closely linked to specific historical and cultural conditions. Kołakowski points out that postmodern reflection questions the finality of philosophical thinking, suggesting that the systems of European philosophy which legitimize this certainty are the result of specific methods of thinking dominant in a given era, as well as particular assumptions about human nature. Postmodernism assumes that it is impossible to integrate different philosophical currents because there is no universal language that could objectively convey the meaning of concepts, and every use of a particular philosophical language always reflects a specific worldview (Kołakowski, 2012). Postmodernism emphasizes the impermanence and conventionality of all orders of meaning, axiological, methodological, and epistemological, undermining the belief in their universal and stable nature. In this framework, a particular type of existential consciousness emerges, within which the subject can attain the promise of freedom, authenticity, and agency by acknowledging the pluralism of perspectives and opening up to dialogue with the Other. This freedom is understood as emancipation from the dominance of totalizing meta-narratives of modernity, such as rationalism or the primacy of science, and the subject is constituted in relation to many competing discourses of power. In this view, the meaning of human existence and the order of values are not discovered or normatively

grounded, but are generated in the process of continuous confrontation between equal perspectives (Rorty, 2009). Dialogue and dispute do not serve an explanatory or teleological function here, but instead become a mechanism of continuous deconstruction of prevailing norms and meanings. This dynamic leads to the erosion of stable axiological foundations and, consequently, to the weakening of the subject's ability to make responsible choices, with the choice itself becoming illusory. The promise of autonomy, constructed in conditions of continuous deconstruction, then appears as fragile and illusory, because instead of allowing for conscious shaping of life, it reduces to a constant undermining of everything that could provide lasting meaning and a foundation for decisions. Dialogue, which "explains nothing", ceases to be a space for understanding and becomes a process of self-sustaining destabilization, in which freedom is reduced to a lack of commitment rather than to a conscious striving for truth, good, or community: "Man is a being constituted by thinking about himself; his effort should be aimed at achieving authenticity, shedding, to the extent possible, all forms of reification, all subjugation to external, 'thing-like' forms of existence" (Kołakowski, 2000, p. 29). From a postmodern perspective, this freedom, however, has an authentic character because it arises from the deconstruction of hierarchies and the affirmation of the multiplicity of voices, allowing one to avoid the illusion of the individual's autonomization. The subject does not regain autonomy in isolation, but in relationality, recognizing the difference of the Other as an equal element in the play of meanings. However, postmodernism does not actually advocate for the affirmation of the hierarchy of the Other's values; on the contrary, by consistently deconstructing hierarchies as arbitrary products of power and discourse, it reduces "respect" for the Other to a pluralistic tolerance of perspectives, rather than acknowledging their normative orders as superior. The Other is indeed included in the dialogue, but without granting their values a privileged status. Such a concept of freedom inevitably generates tensions, leading to accusations of its superficiality and limitations imposed by relativism. Negatively understood, "liberation from" norms does not translate into a positive "striving for" truth or community, but results in the fragmentation of identity, relativistic dispersion, and nihilistic emptiness. As a result, the subject, instead of genuinely regaining autonomy, falls into dependence on new, subtle forms of hegemony, concealed under the guise of pluralism, which undermines the very promise of reclaiming subjectivity. The subject ceases to be an ethical subject and becomes a carrier of narratives or a "text to be interpreted". This threatens its dehumanization, as it remains without a normative shield that could protect it from the hegemony of new forms of power (Žižek, 2008). Postmodernist reflection emphasizes that classical philosophy, which sought to achieve objective and rational knowledge of reality and assumed the existence of a universal truth, no longer meets the intellectual challenges of contemporary times. It is anachronistic and belongs to the past, because: "All metaphysical positions are equally good; I do not take any particular stance myself, I simply express the principle of tolerance, which, although commendable, is formal in nature and will never reveal, nor even inspire, any metaphysical idea. But by trying to uphold this principle while simultaneously sticking to

my particular point of view, I fall into inconsistency, since I then claim that my position is as good as any other, even though it is incompatible with any other” (Kołakowski, 2012, p. 121). Kołakowski emphasizes both the intellectual sterility of this position, as the principle of tolerance, while a valuable and desirable attitude, in this context takes on a formal character, contributing nothing new to the philosophical discourse, and reveals its inherent contradiction, how to reconcile this imperative of tolerance with the privileged epistemological position granted to it, while maintaining loyalty to one's own point of view. This paradox exposes the contradiction of postmodern relativism, which, while defending its doctrine, grants it epistemological primacy, the very existence of which it simultaneously undermines. This means that relativism, while attempting to eliminate dogmatism, itself introduces a dogmatic hierarchy. Moreover, this relativism, although freeing us from the shackles of rigid paradigms, does so at the cost of metaphysical grounding (Kołakowski, 2002). The human being, therefore, who constitutes the meaning of the world, operates in conditions of limited ability to rationally organize various spheres of life, where meanings are shaped randomly and dependent on the demands of culture. In postmodern thought, there is no universal transcendental criterion that constitutes and sustains the meaning of reality, because reality consists of many equal perspectives and “multiplicities of universes” (Lechte, p. 428). Furthermore, the meaning and significance of the world are constantly modified by cultural and civilizational changes, which undermines the permanence of any established values. Kołakowski notes that postmodernism's questioning of the objective validity of value systems leads to Weber's concept of *Entzauberung*, which constitutes the core of today's widespread discomfort in culture, and he wonders, “Where should we look for the sources of those aspects of modernity that make this discomfort particularly unpleasant?” (Kołakowski, 1999, p. 191). He notes that the valorization of diversity and difference, typical of postmodern thought, is simultaneously in contradiction with the doctrinal European paradigm that regards the individual as the fundamental measure of value and meaning, a paradigm that “created the idea of humanism in the form of faith in the inalienable value of personality” (Kołakowski, 1984, p. 21). Identifying postmodernism as a stage in the development of philosophical thought, the philosopher particularly opposes postmodernism's attempts to nullify the heritage of European philosophical thought by eliminating old philosophical questions, especially since “we have never stopped and probably will never stop asking such questions. We will never rid ourselves of the temptation to perceive the world as an enigmatic cipher, to which we stubbornly try to find the key, and moreover, we will persist in searching for that key. And from where does this highest legitimacy of the verdict, which forbids us from such searches, derive?” (Kołakowski, 2012, p. 139). Kołakowski observes that engaging with irresolvable philosophical questions constitutes the essence of the human being, who expresses their existence not in the calm of ready-made answers, but in the constant effort of updating and searching for the meaning of the world. Inert self-satisfaction emerges here as a dangerous factor in the destruction of civilization, not only in the sense of losing the significance of once-great ideas but also in the

erosion of community, because without the effort of seeking meaning, societies are doomed to fragmentation and cynicism. It thus becomes necessary to recognize a certain privileged cognitive perspective, expressed through the conscious acceptance or rejection of the axiological and methodological assumptions that shape the point of reference, and thereby the order of values. Adopting this perspective is a return to classical metaphysics, to its classic questions that touch the core of being, the meaning of existence, and the boundary of the knowable, and which constitute the ontological essence of humanity. From this perspective, good is not a subjective convention or an arbitrary norm, but a real realization of the fullness of existence; ethics is not a relative negotiation of values, but a hierarchy of virtues leading to the fullness of humanity; and science does not pretend to replace philosophy. Kołakowski reminds us that there is no philosophy completely devoid of assumptions, capable of revealing the objective, unreduced nature of human reality. Absolute postmodern relativism, which treats all values and positions as equivalent, leads to a cognitive illusion. By questioning the contingency of postmodern ideas, their affirmation of values based solely on a subjective hierarchy of preferences and the ambivalence of attitudes, Kołakowski also critiques the very notion of the era, drawing attention to its elusiveness and complexity, which cannot be reduced to a single, named framework. As he states, “No era and no civilization can conceptually identify themselves. Such identification can only be made once the era has passed into the past” (Kołakowski, 1999, p. 186). The philosopher starts with the fundamental epistemological assumption that no era or civilization is capable of adequate conceptual self-identification during its own duration. The participants of a given era remain inevitably immersed in the present, which sets the horizon for their thinking, judgments, and interpretations. Only from a historical perspective, possible after the departure of a given cultural formation, can a relatively coherent conceptual understanding of it be achieved. For this reason, any attempts to conceptually define the character of a given era should be considered problematic, even a terminological abuse, as they require a cognitive distance that is not yet accessible to historical subjects functioning within the same era. This inability arises from the fact that every era is based on a set of absolute, *implicitly* accepted axiological and cognitive assumptions that are not subject to reflection but function as self-evident elements of reality. It is these “self-evidencies” that constitute the internal order of the era, while simultaneously making it invisible to its participants, which is why we are fundamentally incapable of discovering the assumptions of our own era. As a result, historical subjects are unable to grasp the overall meaning of their own historical situation or define its identity in an adequate way, unless, as Kołakowski metaphorically puts it, the owl of Minerva has already flown out, meaning only when philosophical reflection becomes a *post factum* reflection (Kołakowski, 1999).

The Project of Modernity

In this broad context, modernity emerges as a particularly problematic category, as its essence is not a stable set of characteristics, but a dynamic tension between structure and evolution, between the affirmation of the existing order of the world and the need for its continuous transcendence. Modernity does not consist of a simple break with the past, nor its uncritical preservation, but rather a permanent dispute over the meaning of tradition, progress, and change. Kołakowski notes that “the conflict between the old-fashioned and the modern is undoubtedly eternal, and we will never get rid of it, as it expresses the natural tension between structure and evolution. Every society clearly needs both conservative forces and those that promote change, and one must doubt whether any theory could create good tools with which we could measure the relative strength of these opposing energies” (Kołakowski, 1999, p. 187). This tension constitutes both modern historical consciousness and the conflicts embedded in the very project of modern civilization. For this reason, the identification of any civilization is largely determined by its positioning in relation to the past. The past here is not merely a collection of historical facts, but serves a normative and interpretative function, establishing the framework within which cultural self-definition is possible. Disputes about the sources of European modern civilization, therefore, express deeper axiological tensions related to the question of continuity and rupture, heritage and innovation, tradition and emancipation. Kołakowski simultaneously emphasizes the arbitrary nature of attempts to conceptually identify the modernity of contemporary European culture. The lack of clear criteria for distinguishing its constitutive features means that concepts such as “modernity” or “postmodernity” function more as interpretative tools than as precise analytical categories. The philosopher's skeptical declaration that he does not know what postmodernity is or how it differs from modernity does not express cognitive helplessness, but rather a conscious critique of the ambition of philosophy attempting to capture the meaning of its own era in a final and unequivocal manner (Kołakowski, 1999). As a result, Kołakowski's reflection leads to the conclusion that modernity, like any other cultural formation, remains an open category, continually negotiated and historically variable. Attempts to define it definitively are doomed to incompleteness because they arise from the very reality they seek to describe. Thus, thinking about modernity becomes not so much a matter of definition, but a critical reflection on the limits of historical self-awareness.

One of the fundamental dimensions of modernity is the process of secularization, which, as Kołakowski emphasizes, leads not so much to the elimination of *the sacred*, but to its transformation. In *The Presence of Myth*, Kołakowski points out that the need for meaning, the absolute, and ultimate justification is not eradicated with the triumph of scientific rationality. On the contrary, myth, understood as a structure of meaning that gives coherence and sense to the world, remains a permanent element of human experience, even in the context

of modern secularization. Modernity, by proclaiming emancipation from myth, in reality, fails to free itself from it, but merely represses it to the unconscious sphere or transforms it into substitute forms (Kołakowski, 1994). As a result, this process leads to an existential crisis of meaning, which becomes one of the key elements of the contemporary human condition. The removal of *the sacred* as a universally binding point of reference results in the fragmentation of the experience of the world and a weakening of the normative foundations of morality. In *If God Is Dead*, Kołakowski formulates one of the most pressing questions of modernity: whether, in a world deprived of a transcendental foundation, it is possible to objectively justify good and evil. The philosopher does not offer simple answers but exposes the dramatic tension between the need for absolute norms and the awareness of their metaphysical uncertainty (Kołakowski, 1987). In this sense, the conflict between traditional Christian wisdom and the scientific view of the world is not limited to doctrinal dispute but concerns the very structure of human existence's meaning. Science, though highly effective in describing and explaining reality, is incapable of providing answers to ultimate questions that continue to demand answers. The repression of *the sacred* does not eliminate these questions but makes them more dramatic and devoid of clear solutions. Kołakowski points out that under conditions of secularization, *the sacred* returns in distorted forms, often as secular absolutes: political ideologies, utopias of progress, the cult of reason, or history. This phenomenon represents an attempt to compensate for lost transcendence, yet these efforts often lead to the absolutization of the *profane*, which in turn deepens the crisis of existential meaning rather than overcoming it. In response to this situation, European culture undertakes an effort to organize the axiological sphere, drawing on tradition as a relatively lasting resource of norms, behavioral patterns, and symbolic structures of meaning. Tradition, though no longer endowed with metaphysical certainty, still serves an orienting and stabilizing function, allowing for the preservation of the minimal conditions of moral order in a world affected by the crisis of *the sacred*. However, it does not provide a final solution to the problem of meaning, but rather stands as a testimony to the inescapable need to root human experience in something that transcends purely instrumental rationality. From Kołakowski's perspective, modernity thus appears as a formation marked by permanent ambivalence: on the one hand, the striving for emancipation from myth and transcendence, and on the other, the inability to function without the structures of meaning that myth and *the sacred* traditionally provided (Kołakowski, 1994). Philosophy is not a tool for ultimate resolution here, but a form of critical reflection on the tragic dimension of the modern human condition, in which the need for the absolute remains in irreconcilable tension with the experience of its absence. Tradition serves as a fundamental source of intellectual authority, enabling the preservation of cultural and normative identity. In Kołakowski's view, modernity, in its pursuit of rationalizing all dimensions of reality, gradually eliminates those elements of culture that cannot be fully justified by reason, thus leading to the weakening of the experience of *the sacred*. This process results in a crisis of meaning, understood as the loss of the metaphysical horizon within which human actions and

values could find ultimate justification. In response to this situation, cultural conservatism emerges as a stance affirming the significance of tradition and taboo as inalienable components of the moral order. Taboo does not function here as a manifestation of irrationalism or as a primitive prohibition, but as a primordial, ethical form of establishing boundaries, without which interpersonal relationships are subject to instrumentalization. Through the prohibitions sanctified by tradition, taboos sustain the awareness of the existence of the Other as a subject, toward whom absolute ethical norms apply. Kołakowski emphasizes that the fundamental values of European civilization, such as the inviolability of the right to life, the idea of human dignity, and personal rights, do not have ultimate justification within the framework of instrumental rationality. Their legitimacy is based on a metaphysical assumption about the inherent dignity of the human being, which is innate, independent of external conditions and circumstances, and cannot be reduced to the pure logic of means and ends. Their validity relies on prohibitions of an ‘irrational’ taboo nature, which, however, constitute the condition for the existence of a lasting moral order. Attempting to replace *the sacred* with secular absolutes proves to be dangerous and insufficient; it is a shortcut that leads to further erosion of meaning, revealing the limitations of the modern project of rationalizing culture, especially since: “In the normal sense of the word ‘rationality’, there are no rational reasons for respecting human life and personal rights, just as there are no rational reasons for the prohibition of eating shrimp by Jews, meat on Fridays by Catholics, or wine by Muslims. All of these are ‘irrational’ taboos” (Kołakowski, 1999, p. 200). The philosopher thus draws attention to the role of the sacred and taboo in maintaining moral order. The process of secularization removes *the sacred* from modern culture, but at the same time, it does not automatically eliminate the need to experience meaning or search for the absolute; it merely shifts this need to another order. Attempts to replace the transcendental foundations of normativity with secular “absolutes” prove insufficient, as they do not protect the dignity and inalienable value of the human person, nor its moral status. In this view, taboo serves as an essential element of moral order, defining the boundaries of permissible action and safeguarding social relations from instrumentalization, which can be seen as a reference to Kant's philosophy of morality: “Among all forms of practical knowledge, moral laws and their principles not only differ fundamentally from all others, which contain some empirical element, but the entire moral philosophy is entirely based on its pure part, and when applied to man, it borrows nothing from knowledge of his nature, but provides him, as a rational being, with *a priori* laws” (Kant, 2001, p. 12).

Leszek Kołakowski's reflections on contemporary civilization focus on the problem of shaping human subjectivity in the context of the increasing rationalization and secularization of culture. The philosopher notes that the dominance of instrumental rationality and utilitarian thinking leads to the reduction of the human being to the role of a social function or a carrier of specific utility. Such reduction weakens the normative foundations of the community, as it eliminates values that cannot be captured in terms of efficiency, but which are simultaneously essential for maintaining lasting human relationships. In this context,

Kołodkowski emphasizes the importance of solidarity as a key element in the value structure of European civilization: “It is difficult to define what human dignity is; it is not an empirical discovery, but without it, we are in trouble when trying to answer a simple question: why is slavery wrong? Despite its closeness, the concept of human dignity is sufficiently adequate to address such a question” (Kołodkowski, 1999, p. 216). Solidarity is, therefore, for Kołodkowski not the result of individual interest or social agreements, but a primordial normative assumption that allows us to recognize the Other as a full moral subject. Without such recognition, the meaning of human personality fades, and social relations become subordinated solely to the logic of instrumental rationality (Król, 2016). Another important concept in Kołodkowski’s reflections is responsibility, treated as a constitutive dimension of human subjectivity. Responsibility is not an addition to being human, something external to it, but a condition for the constitution of the moral subject: “The sense of responsibility, which cannot be entirely transferred to ready-made rules, yet is connected to values experienced as non-arbitrary (though historically and humanly rooted in their origin), is therefore an essential condition for a life in which reality appears meaningful, and the human individual as free” (Kołodkowski, 2000, p. 172). It is precisely from the perspective of responsibility that the inalienable status of the person is revealed, a status that cannot be subordinated to either criteria of utility or the logic of rational management of social resources (Tischner, 1999). The condition for the survival of European civilization is, therefore, the affirmation of the inalienable value of the human person, understood as a permanent moral commitment, expressed in the idea of solidarity with others and in responsibility for the community of fate and the shared world. Without them, all institutions, laws, and social order lose their meaning, and moral norms become relative, subject to the whims of the moment or the will of authoritarian individuals (Varoufakis, 2024). The acceptance and affirmation of this assumption absolutizes the idea of humanity, which is not a function of utility or efficiency. Although this idea is an abstract and intellectual concept, it is exemplified in the form of very practical legal and social solutions, of which we are daily beneficiaries. Solutions such as dignity and the inviolability of every human being. Therefore, this abstract idea forms the basis and argument for the existence of a coherent and just community, without which social life would reduce to aimless drifting or selfish games of interests, where the triumph of social Darwinism as the prevailing ideology would be an inevitable consequence (Kołodkowski, 1999). This concept, and precisely the recognition of the human person as an absolute value, allows European culture to maintain its durability and meaning, even in the face of crises that break the bonds with *the sacred* and weaken traditional structures of responsibility: “Humanity is not defined by specific markers distinguishing it from other species, but by participation in the realm of rational necessity, epistemologically expressed as a set of synthetic *a priori* judgments, as well as in the sphere of unconditional and compelling moral imperatives, which cannot be empirically established” (Kołodkowski, 1984, p. 132).

Conclusion

The works of Leszek Kołakowski, through their deep analyses of cultural and philosophical phenomena, serve as a key point of reference for contemporary debates on individual freedom, particularly in the context of modernism and postmodernism. Kołakowski examines the dynamic transformations of contemporary culture and provides a keen diagnosis of their impact on human freedom and subjectivity. In the context of modernism, which emphasized faith in reason, progress, and individual autonomy, Kołakowski identifies the dangers arising from excessive technocratic dominance, which leads to the dehumanization of the individual, treated as a mere element of a larger machine. Kołakowski points to the necessity of critical reflection on this concept, questioning the true freedom of the individual in light of the growing role of technology and institutions, which increasingly shape its life. In the context of postmodernism, which undermines grand narratives, including the idea of progress and objective truth, Kołakowski highlights the relativity and contradictions of these assumptions. In postmodernism, where truth and identity become relative, and traditional structures of power and hierarchies are questioned, Kołakowski sees both an opportunity for liberation from the dominance of dogmatism and a danger of normative chaos. On the one hand, postmodernism creates space for individual freedom, but on the other, in the face of the crisis of stable values, it fosters the emergence of new forms of dependency and domination, which can evoke feelings of confusion and alienation. According to Kołakowski, freedom is not a fixed value or something given once and for all; it is a dynamic space that the individual must constantly shape, defend, and rediscover. Kołakowski draws attention to the fact that in a world full of contradictions, ideologies, and technological tools, the ability to think independently and make autonomous decisions becomes a challenge that cannot be ignored. In the context of a globalized world, where the boundaries between humans and technology are becoming increasingly fluid, Kołakowski poses fundamental questions about the balance between individual freedom and the demands of contemporary civilization. He argues that individual freedom should not be treated as something absolute, but as a space that must be protected from instrumentalization by technology, politics, and other dominant ideologies (Naim, 2022). Kołakowski's reflections on contemporary cultural challenges, especially in the context of the relationship between technology and humanity, serve as an important point of reference for current debates on freedom, responsibility, and subjectivity in the posthumanist era.

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