

ZBIGNIEW MENTZEL

# THE LESZEK KOŁAKOWSKI ARCHIVE AT THE NATIONAL LIBRARY

## 1

The private archive of Leszek Kołakowski, internationally renowned Polish philosopher, historian of ideas and writer, was donated to the National Library of Poland in Warsaw by Mrs Tamara Kołakowska, widow of this eminent humanist, in July 2010, one year after his death.<sup>1</sup>

In past years, prestigious research centres from all over the world had made efforts to acquire this Archive. As early as in the 1990s, The Hoover Institution on War, Revolution and Peace sent their representatives to the Kołakowskis' house in Oxford and offered to purchase the complete collection of the philosopher's letters and manuscripts. They refused the offer (as they did in the case of all similar proposals made by Western institutions), since Leszek Kołakowski was convinced that the materials gathered through the years, a testimony to his life and work, should ultimately go to Poland. This matter was first discussed with the management of the National Library back in 2003. Seven years later, the donation agreement was signed.

## 2

Aside from the extensive collection of personal documents, the Archive consists, among other things, of manuscripts, typescripts, first printings in the press of most of the philosopher's papers, notes for his lectures and

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<sup>1</sup> *Katalog rękopisów Biblioteki Narodowej*, t. 23: *Archiwum Leszka Kołakowskiego* [Leszek Kołakowski Archive], ed. M. Gamczyk-Kłuźniak, Warszawa 2015.

talks, interviews, an abundant set of correspondence, comments for international press and a number of materials related to the political activity conducted by Kołakowski for many years. A separate section of the Archive comprises articles about the philosopher from the years 1965–2008 as well as master’s and PhD dissertations about his work, catalogued in two volumes. Papers by various researchers sent to Kołakowski from all over the world, usually with handwritten authors’ dedications, can also be found there. Finally, there are honorary doctorates and diplomas from numerous universities, foundations and associations along with the documentation of prestigious distinctions granted to Kołakowski, including the John W. Kluge Prize awarded by the US Library of Congress (called the “Nobel Prize in philosophy”).

The abundance and diversity of the collection is astonishing, especially considering the largely unfavourable conditions in which the Archive was created. We must not forget that since the second half of the 1960s Prof. Leszek Kołakowski was subject to political persecution on the part of the communist authorities in Poland, fiercely attacked for spreading subversive ideas opposing the official ideology. In 1968, during the so-called “March Events”, he was dismissed by the authorities from the University of Warsaw as a “troublemaker” who led young people’s minds in a direction “manifestly inconsistent with the country’s and nation’s dominating development tendency”. With no right to either teach or publish, Kołakowski left Poland after a couple of months that very year, as the “dominating development tendency” led to massive anti-Semitic and anti-intelligentsia campaigns, poisoning and paralysing all authentic public life in Poland for many years.

When leaving the country at the invitation of the McGill University in Montreal, Leszek Kołakowski had no precise plans for the future; however, he expected to return to Poland after a year or two. The Archive contains official documents relating to the departure of the philosopher and his family: decisions on the issue, withdrawal and reissue of passports along with customs and currency exchange declarations together with a list of items declared for clearance. Naturally, Kołakowski had no possibility or intention of taking all or even the majority of his keepsakes, documents or manuscripts abroad. Over time, the Kołakowskis’ friends took care of the items they left at their apartment on Senatorska street in Warsaw; however, they were still not safe, as those people, involved for the most part in “illegal” democratic opposition movements in the subsequent years, were exposed to police surveillance and property revisions, which often lead to confiscation of the materials they kept.

While in the West, Leszek Kołakowski led a rambling life for many years, travelling from Europe to America and back due to his research and teaching duties in Oxford and at many American universities (Berkeley, Yale, Chicago). This lifestyle made it clearly harder to systematically collect manuscripts, correspondence or workshop materials.

Another unfavourable factor was the rather careless or even dismissive attitude Leszek Kołakowski had towards his own works. He believed and declared on numerous occasions that he generally wrote and published far more words and sentences than was appropriate; he was a complete stranger to the idea of keeping them all for future generations. According to Mrs Tamara Kołakowska, he intended to simply tear up and throw away many of his papers, which she managed to prevent. Over time, the Kołakowskis adopted a ritual they carefully performed at their Oxford home: at the end of each year, all correspondence and other documents accumulated during the last twelve months were solemnly transferred from desk drawers to large cardboard boxes and subsequently stored in the garden shed. Over the years, they gathered over ninety such boxes.

### 3

For four years, Maria Gamczyk-Kluźniak from the National Library worked on organising and cataloguing the Archive. The result is a detailed catalogue clearly describing all the materials from the collection. Once completed and made available to the public, the Archive opened a brand new era in the research on the life and work of Leszek Kołakowski. It became clear that our understanding of the creative personality of this prominent philosopher was incompatible with the significance he had for Polish history and international humanities.

For two decades since 1968, Kołakowski's philosophical writings circulated in semi-clandestine channels in Poland. The mere use of his name was subject to censorship, while his works, especially the later ones, published after he left the country, were blacklisted. According to communist legislation, their publication, distribution, and allegedly even their reading "threatened the fundamental interest of the state" and were criminalised.

For many years, even though Kołakowski's essays and books released in Polish by editors and publishers in exile were trafficked across the borders to reach readers in Poland, their circulation was unavoidably limited to the elites, restricted and artificially narrowed, leaving thousands of interested readers with no access to them. (When describing the crowds gathered in the 1960s at public lectures given by Kołakowski, a journalist

of the weekly “Świat” [The World] stated in astonishment that “in Warsaw, apart from the high demand for television sets, refrigerators, furniture and beef, there is great demand for philosophy”.)

Of course following 1989, the year when communism in Poland was over along with censorship, this abnormal situation started to change. Most of the philosopher’s books published previously were reissued, the new ones came out without delay, and every effort was made to provide readers with texts formerly preserved in typescript and kept somewhere in drawers or published in exotic locations in the past. Following the three-volume edition of the dispersed writings of 1955-1968 (published by Wydawnictwo Puls), edited by the undersigned, the Znak publishers released further collections of articles from later years (*Wśród znajomych* [Among Friends], *Is God Happy?*, *Our Merry Apocalypse*, *Kościół w krainie wolności* [The Church in the Land of Liberty] and *Uncertainties of a Democratic Age*).

Also, two volumes of interviews with Leszek Kołakowski were published, dedicated to his personal philosophy and everyday life (*Czas ciekawy, czas niespokojny* [Interesting Times, Turbulent Times]); the author of this paper was making efforts to obtain these interviews for over eighteen years! Nonetheless, our understanding of the philosopher’s life and work still remains limited if not insufficient. Let us note that no complete bibliography of his primary and secondary sources has come out so far. Even more significantly, no biography of Kołakowski has come into existence either. For its authors, the Archive made available by the National Library will be a fundamental and invaluable source when they finally attempt to face this challenge.

#### 4

The forced departure from Poland in 1968 became the major turning point dividing Kołakowski’s life into two equal parts: he spent forty-one years in his home country, and the following forty-one abroad. The materials gathered in the Archive testify to the second period to a greater extent, which is fortunate as it remains less studied than the previous one, especially by Polish researchers.

However, those researching Kołakowski’s biography also encounter numerous blank spots in the first period, which may disappear, at least to a certain extent, with the Archive being made available.

Leszek Kołakowski was no stranger to the idea that childhood, approximately until twelve years of age, is the period when people “become what

they will be throughout their entire lives”. Or indeed: “they already are.”<sup>2</sup> According to him, being a child under the age of five in a loving family where nothing goes seriously wrong was the only way to happiness invented by mankind. This, however, was not the experience of Kołakowski: his mother, Lucyna Pietrusiewicz-Kołakowska, died when he was only three years old. In principle, Kołakowski never discussed the issue of his parents and family origin, for both emotional reasons (talking about deceased loved ones was taboo for him) and scarce knowledge of the facts. Thankfully, the family materials kept in the Archive contain documents as priceless for a biographer as “The Pietrusiewicz Family Tree” or certificates testifying to the financial situation of Kołakowski’s mother. However, there are no documents that would make it possible to reconstruct the family genealogy of his father, Jerzy Kołakowski, a freethinker, pedagogue and journalist born in St. Petersburg.

The Archive contains interesting materials documenting the years of Kołakowski’s university studies in the late 1940s, when he was politically involved on the side of the communists. As a student of the University of Łódź, he signed up with the most radical, far-left youth organisation called *Akademicki Związek Walki Młodych „Życie”* [Academic Young Fighters’ Society “Life”], soon to join the Polish Workers’ Party. Party activists were a minority among the students back then, and disregarded as those who preferred gaining power over knowledge. For the young Kołakowski, both were equally important. He had no tolerance for ignorance in the academic community and fiercely opposed any preferential treatment for political activists. Even though “Życie” held preparatory training courses for young people from working class and rural backgrounds, those who completed them had to meet the same requirements as everyone else.

The Archive contains talks delivered by Leszek Kołakowski as a student in seminars and meetings of the Philosophical Society. Contrary to widespread belief, his fields of interest were not limited to Marxism-Leninism. His contributions covered a wide range of topics, from “The Concept of Guilt in Dante’s Works” to overviews of the fundamentals of existentialism.

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It is worth noting that the Archive provides researchers with books and essays of Kołakowski never published before. In some cases, their release

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2 L. Kołakowski, *Czas ciekawy, czas niespokojny. Z Leszkiem Kołakowskim rozmawia Zbigniew Mentzel. Część I* [Interesting Times, Turbulent Times. Leszek Kołakowski interviewed by Zbigniew Mentzel. Part 1], Kraków 2007, p. 38.

was prevented by Polish censorship before 1968, while others were never submitted for publication by the author.

Such works include *Synody* [The Synods], a typescript of a church document anthology from the mid-1950s; a few dozen entries for two volumes of the Dictionary of Philosophers whose printing was interrupted by the authorities; also, there is an essay entitled “Richard Avenarius and the Apparent Suicide of Philosophy”, prepared as the introduction to an anthology of Avenarius’ works in the *Biblioteka Klasyków Filozofii* [Library of Philosophy Classics] series, brought down by censorship. There is also the manuscript of an unfinished book about Jesus Christ written in French (recently re-read and published by Mrs Tamara Kołakowska as *Jezus ośmieszony. Esej sceptyczny i apologetyczny* [Jesus Mocked: An Apologetic and Sceptical Essay]. There is an essay entitled *Śmierć jako własność prywatna* [Death as Private Property] and an emotional obituary to the eminent Polish film director Andrzej Munk following his tragic death. There is a sketch on the responsibility for Nazi crimes based on *Doctor Faustus* by Thomas Mann (also censored). Finally, there are shrewd essays on politics written in various periods such as *Notatki Marsjanina z obserwacji programów i ideologii polskich partii* [A Martian’s notes from looking into the programmes and ideologies of the Polish political parties].

Apart from texts that have never been published, the Archive contains manuscripts, typescripts and photocopies of first prints in the press of hundreds of articles, essays and reviews by Leszek Kołakowski published in over a dozen countries by prestigious journals, both general interest and specialised. Many of those texts, originally written in several languages (mainly in English, French and German), have not been translated into Polish yet, nor have they appeared in any of the author’s books published so far. They could be successfully compiled in a few volumes arranged by topic or genre (for example one of such volumes could be dedicated to reviews of books on important people of the 20th century such as Mahatma Gandhi, Margaret Thatcher or Lech Wałęsa).

Also, lectures (and notes for lectures) along with Kołakowski’s contributions to innumerable public debates, conferences and symposiums can be found in the Archive. These include, for example, the typescript of the famous public talk entitled *Jesus Christ – Prophet and Reformer* from the mid-1960s, with the author’s corrections, held within a cycle of lectures organised by the Club for International Books and Press (KMPiK), as well as manuscripts and typescripts of lectures from later years such as *Why Do We Need Money?, Zabijanie ułomnych niemowląt jako podstawowy*

*problem filozoficzny* [Killing Handicapped Newborns as a Primary Philosophical Concern], *Can the Devil Be Saved?*, *Rozpad komunizmu jako wydarzenie filozoficzne* [The Collapse of Communism as a Philosophical Event] and *What Do We Need Human Rights For?*. This part of the Archive also includes magnetic tapes with lectures on heresy given by Leszek Kołakowski in the Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Polish service along with manuscripts of two series of TV lectures which brought him to fame in the last years of his life: *Mini wykłady o maxi sprawach* [Mini Lectures on Maxi Matters] and *O co nas pytają wielcy filozofowie* [What Questions are we Asked by Great Philosophers?]. Special attention should be paid to the corrected typescript of a talk entitled *The Anxiety of Our Age* delivered by Kołakowski at the opening ceremony of the 60th Jubilee Congress of the Polish Surgeons' Association on 13 September 2001, two days after the worst terrorist attack in the US.

## 6

Interviews from the years 1969–2009, often recorded on magnetic tapes and DVDs, form a separate section (interestingly, Kołakowski gave no interviews before leaving the country). As Leszek Kołakowski was regarded by many Western journalists as an expert on the “Polish question”, he was interviewed with particular frequency in those historical moments when the entire world turned their eyes to Poland and the Poles.

A large set of interviews concerns the election of Karol Wojtyła as Pope and predictions as to the character of his papacy. For Kołakowski, it was clear that from the perspective of the role played by the Church in the world, it was meaningful that John Paul II “had spent his priesthood years in a hostile political environment, but in a friendly social context, and that due to his personal experience he was perfectly familiar with the issue of confrontation between the Catholic Church and the communist regime, this being also the reason why his presence could be decisive for a renewed interpretation of the dispute between the integrist and the progressive tendencies in Christianity.”<sup>3</sup>

Another large group of interviews refers to the strikes on the Polish coast that led to the emergence of Solidarity, the first independent trade

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3 L. Kołakowski, “Pomyślne prorocтва i pobożne życzenia laika na progu nowego pontyfikatu w wiecznej sprawie praw cesarskich i boskich” [Layman’s Fair Prophecies and Pious Wishes at the Start of a New Papacy in the Context of the Eternal Question of the Caesar’s and God’s Rights], in L. Kołakowski, *Czy diabeł może być zbawiony i 27 innych kazań* [Can the Devil be Saved and 27 Other Sermons], London 1984, p. 194.

union in a communist country, in 1980. Kołakowski explained to the world that what made those developments so singular was the fact that it was the first time in history that a workers' revolution took place – against a socialist country and under the sign of the Cross. Following 1981, when Martial Law was imposed in Poland, he explained in dozens of interviews that while the social movement embodied by Solidarity was a new phenomenon in the entire history of the Soviet regime, this counter-revolutionary response was also unseen before, as the military dictatorship revealed its violent character, stripping off the fig leaf of ideology.

## 7

After Kołakowski left Poland, the Western world, previously locked on the other side of the iron curtain, opened up to him. He could now accept the numerous invitations to conferences, symposiums and debates he received. The materials gathered in the Archive allow us to draw a detailed, very extensive map of his research trips covering several continents (out of all the European countries he only missed two: Albania and Finland). This would also be a map of his contacts with researchers, including prominent figures or even true titans of the 20th century such as Isaiah Berlin, Alfred Tarski, Paul Ricoeur, Hannah Arendt, Mircea Eliade, Saul Bellow etc.

However, paradoxically, we cannot help forming the impression that Kołakowski's life prior to his departure was more intense, meaningful in its social aspect, marked by real, profound friendships that became scarce in the later period. The need to stay close to his home country and the friends he left there was one of the overriding reasons why Kołakowski did not opt for settling down in the US, despite being offered better conditions at some of its universities.

When discussing his relationships with the most prominent contemporary thinkers, he emphasised that he felt no spiritual kinship or affinity with them. One could only have the impression that in the world of thought he was a lonely, isolated figure. Why did that happen? – “Everyone,” – he explained – “has an area inside their soul that is completely locked and does not wish to be exposed; this area might be smaller or larger depending on the particular person. Naturally, I have one too. This is probably why I find it hard or even impossible to engage in very close relationships with others who work in similar fields of thought.”<sup>4</sup>

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4 L. Kołakowski, *Czas ciekawy, czas niespokojny*, op. cit., p. 95.



Undoubtedly, researchers studying the life and work of Leszek Kołakowski will pay special attention to the enormous correspondence from the years 1948–2009, divided in the Catalogue into two hundred and eighty-three volumes (!). These are mostly letters sent to Kołakowski, but mutual correspondence is also available and its volume will most likely increase over time as many people declare their willingness to hand his letters over to the National Library.

The mere list of people and institutions that contacted him testifies to the Polish philosopher's significant contribution to global intellectual life and to his established position in the world of the humanities. These are only some random examples of senders whose letters can be found in the correspondence volume: Centre d'Études Artistiques de l'Europe Centrale (Paris), Centre d'Études Transdisciplinaires (Paris), Centre du Dialogue (Paris), Centre Européen de la Culture (Geneva), Centre International Lelewel (Brussels), Centre International pour Étude Comparée de Philosophie et d'Esthétique (Tokyo), Centre of Contemporary Culture of Barcelona, Centre Scientifique de l'Académie Polonaise des Sciences (Paris), Centre Thomas Moore (Lyon), Centro Culturale Enrico Manfredini (Bologne), Centro Culturale G. Sacchetti (Padua), Centro Culturale Mondoperaio (Rome), Centro Culturale San Carlo (Milan), Centro de Estudios Público (Santiago-Chile), Centro di Studio Ricerca e Formazione Luigi Bazzucchi (Perugia), Centro Internazionale di Semiotica e Linguistica (Urbino), Centrum Nauki Kopernik (Warsaw), Century: A Television History of the Twentieth Century (London)... – let this suffice as a sampling.

Most of the ca. sixteen thousand letters gathered in the Archive are arranged alphabetically; however, over a dozen separate sections contain letters from those people and institutions that maintained the most frequent and long-term correspondence with Leszek Kołakowski. Due to the importance of the issues discussed, some of them may likely be published as books in the future. Researchers and the public may find the following particularly interesting:

1. Letters from Jerzy Giedroyc, the founder of the Polish Literary Institute in Paris and editor-in-chief of the *Kultura* monthly, the leading journal of the Polish emigration where Kołakowski published articles such as *Theses on Hope and Despair* and *Sprawa polska* [The Polish Question], two texts of key importance for forming the consciousness of active democratic opposition that emerged in Poland in the mid-1970s. Kołakowski first met Giedroyc – whose journal was regarded

- by communist authorities as the “heart of pestilence” – on his very first trip to Paris in 1956. Ten years later, the editor of *Kultura* tried to persuade him to stay in the West and contribute to initiating a new International, which Kołakowski considered to be “a delusional idea”.
2. Letters from Czesław Miłosz, the greatest Polish poet of the 20th century and Nobel Prize winner of 1980. Kołakowski became friends with Miłosz, professor at the University of California, during his stay in Berkeley. He saw Miłosz as a “truly exceptional” person with a mind utterly focused on faith, God and salvation. “He kept struggling with his religious problems, I could notice that while being an apparent believer, he perfectly understood the reasons for disbelief.”<sup>5</sup> Signs of barbarity in the contemporary world, and especially any symptoms of religious decadence or decline in religious practice are a constant topic in the letters from Miłosz.
  3. Letters from Krzysztof Michalski, director of the Vienna Institute for Human Sciences (IWM) who organised for several years the famous meetings in Castel Gandolfo, the Pope’s summer residence, where John Paul II attended debates of eminent philosophers, including Kołakowski. The Archive contains a “papal bull” (or its parody) that Kołakowski wrote in Latin during one of such meetings, bored by a talk given by Emmanuel Levinas. “It contained a number of heretic and false claims; for example, that not all French philosophers shall be burned at the stake, but only some of them; or that giving money to philosophers was a venial – not a mortal – sin.” The Pope read the bull.<sup>6</sup>
  4. Letters from Andrzej Walicki, philosopher and historian of ideas, professor at the University of Notre Dame and others, leading expert on Russian thought and liberal philosophy, co-founder of the Warsaw School of Historians of Ideas, one of whom was Kołakowski. Will communism ever collapse? Can it ever be revived afterwards, and if so, what would its new form be? For the most part, however, the discussion between Kołakowski and Walicki that goes on in their letters is largely a dispute on the “natural” state of the Russian soul.

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As mentioned above, the materials from the Archive also document Kołakowski’s political activity that stemmed directly from his public

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5 Ibid., p. 32.

6 Ibid., p. 119.

appearances. In the 1970s, many of his texts played a vital role in overcoming Polish “powerlessness”; their animating impact on people’s state of mind must be taken into consideration when reconstructing the spiritual genealogy of the opposition social movement that shook the very foundations of the communist system in Poland and had an international impact over time.

In the memorable *Theses on Hope and Despair* published in 1971, Kołakowski remarked that it was mistaken to ask whether or not communism was reformable, since although communism could improve to become more bearable to people, it will only do so while acting against itself, under constant social pressure; he also cautioned that the limits of such a positive evolution may not be established *a priori*, while “the means of exerting pressure are available and almost everyone can make use of them – that is what matters.”<sup>7</sup> These were the very assumptions of the opposition that formed back in the 1970s, and especially those of the Workers’ Defence Committee (KOR), which the philosopher joined. This became a meaningful precedent which proved that Poles have a right to participate in their country’s history no matter where they live. For decades, the communist propaganda was at pains to make this obvious fact seem incomprehensible to the public. Any uncontrolled social activity conducted in the country with support from abroad was pictured as bordering on high treason.

Kołakowski played a leading role in the British foundation *Apel na rzecz Polskich Robotników* [Appeal for the Polish Workers’ Cause] which contributed, also financially, to the activity of KOR; he brought in many world-renowned cultural and research personalities to become members of the foundation. In the Archive, we will find letters to Leszek Kołakowski from eminent figures such as Saul Bellow, Willy Brandt, Ralf Dahrendorf, Bruno Kreisky or Karl Popper expressing their support for KOR. This commitment of the philosopher provoked a new wave of slanderous attacks on the part of the Polish authorities. They went as far in their shameful political provocations as to fabricate an interview with Kołakowski and Adam Michnik in which they allegedly thanked neo-Nazis for their financial support in *National-Zeitung* – an issue well documented in the Archive. This provocation coincided with Kołakowski being awarded the Peace Prize of the German Book Trade.

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7 L. Kołakowski, *In Stalin’s Countries: Theses on Hope and Despair*, Radio Free Europe, trans. K. Devlin, online pdf: [http://storage.osaarchivum.org/low/23/52/2352ec23-187b-40d7-972c-b2806a30a2e2\\_1.pdf](http://storage.osaarchivum.org/low/23/52/2352ec23-187b-40d7-972c-b2806a30a2e2_1.pdf), p. 20, accessed on 22/10/2015 [translator’s note].

Leszek Kołakowski's private Archive, made available by the National Library, can open brand-new interpretive perspectives to research on his life and work. Let us briefly outline one of them.

In October 1927, the month when Leszek Kołakowski was born, the world learned that the philosopher Henri Bergson, already widely acclaimed in Europe, was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature. Kołakowski believed Bergson was one of the "great philosophers"; he dedicated several significant texts and a separate book to him. In the latter, as he was looking for the right term to define Bergson's role in the eyes of the educated public, he noticed that over time this philosopher had become the "intellectual spokesman of his era".

Intellectual spokesman of his era... let us stop to reflect on this qualification for a while, as upon careful analysis one cannot avoid the impression that it would suitably describe Kołakowski himself.

Today, the term "spokesman" may have political connotations; spokespeople of greater or lesser repute speak in the name of governments, political parties and leaders, presenting their programmes, intentions and activities to the public. Obviously, a spokesman of his era has nothing to do with these. He speaks in the name of people who do not see the world in political terms, much less in terms of political factions. As a witness and participant of various spiritual developments of his age, he is the one to articulate the most momentous questions brought by the evolution of these processes, and helps to seek answers to them. If we list the titles of all the lectures, talks and speeches gathered in the Archive given by Kołakowski all around the world on numerous occasions, especially in the 1980s and the 1990s as well as at the turn of the century, we can see that most of them are articulated as questions. There are those questions that had been there for ages, "questions that cannot be put to death", as well as new ones, resulting from current situations into which we are thrown by the evolution of the world, an anxiety expressed so well reflected by the beginning of a well-known Polish play discussing the human fear of self-annihilation: "So what, Cyril, humanity's on the edge again...".

Leszek Kołakowski comes from a noble family of sceptical philosophers who, when asked fundamental questions, would usually tend to say "I don't know". He emphasised on many occasions that in such cases he was unable to reach definitive conclusions and "kept stumbling on problems that needed to be surrounded by this awkward and evasive conclusion

that on the one hand... but on the other...”.<sup>8</sup> Kołakowski used to remind us that “our lives are lived under the strain of contradictory loyalties. We must choose between conflicting loyalties in concrete situations, and act in favour of one at the expense of another, without repudiating the other altogether”,<sup>9</sup> recalling in this way that our lives are full of inconsistencies, and that if he had to choose between a life that is consistent and one that is simply reasonable, he would choose the latter.

The irresistible question is whether Leszek Kołakowski as a sceptic can be a reliable intellectual spokesman of his age – can he have a charismatic authority, so greatly needed by the largely disoriented people of our times?

In his essay *Charyzmatyczny przywódca, charyzmatyczny nauczyciel* [Charismatic Leader, Charismatic Teacher], Kołakowski argued that people bestowed with true charismatic authority, those we need the most, are not political leaders (who often generate fanaticism or bigotry as they follow the most boorish aspirations of the people), but “guardians, guides or helpers”, a special type of teachers or masters who form part of their teaching themselves, and only then are able to truly stimulate our spiritual development.

Studying Leszek Kołakowski’s Archive helps us to find out how deeply his own personality was engrained in his philosophy. What remained largely unnoticed is that this sceptic who preached in praise of inconsistency was inconsistent in this preaching himself, as he was well aware of the whole range of situations in human life that required perfect consistency. He called them “basic human situations”. We must not forget his own words: “Basic human situations are situations in which tactical considerations cease to be valid, i.e., situations toward which our moral attitude remains invariable whatever the circumstances. If a man is dying of hunger and I can offer him food, there is no set of circumstances in which I can say with justice, ‘However, from the tactical point of view it would be better to let him starve to death.’ Or, if I cannot help him, to say, ‘The best thing to do is ignore it.’ Such basic human situations include clearcut military aggression, genocide, torture, oppression of the helpless... In basic human situations the values of inconsistency no longer apply. Here, we are abruptly faced with a two-value world.”<sup>10</sup>

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8 L. Kołakowski, *Czy Pan Bóg jest szczęśliwy i inne pytania* [Is God Happy and Other Questions], Kraków 2009, p. 5.

9 L. Kołakowski, “In Praise of Inconsistency”, *Dissent*, vol. 10, issue 1, 1963, trans. I. A. Langnas and A. Rosenhaft, p. 208 [translator’s note].

10 *Ibid.*, pp. 208–209 [translator’s note].

## SUMMARY

The private archive of Leszek Kołakowski, internationally renowned Polish philosopher, historian of ideas and writer, was donated to the National Library of Poland in Warsaw by Mrs Tamara Kołakowska, widow of this eminent humanist, in July 2010, one year after his death. As well as an extensive collection of personal documents, the Archive includes manuscripts, typescripts, first printings in the press of most of the philosopher's papers, notes for his lectures and talks, interviews, an abundant set of correspondence, comments for international press and a number of materials related to the political activity conducted by Kołakowski for many years. Studying Leszek Kołakowski's Archive helps us to find out how deeply his own personality was engrained in his philosophy. What remained largely unnoticed is that this sceptic who preached in praise of inconsistency was inconsistent in this preaching himself, as he was well aware of the whole range of situations in human life – which he called “basic human situations” – that required perfect consistency.