

## RADICALISM AS AN ANTINOMIC IDEA<sup>1</sup>

BY **ANDRZEJ GNIAZDOWSKI**

*The aim of the article is a 'critique of radicalism' regarded as a problem, on the one hand, of the history of ideas and, on the other hand, of the sociology of knowledge. In reference to Helmuth Plessner and his critique of social radicalism as a problem of sociology and social ethics taken in the book *The Limits of Community from 1923*, the author attempts to define the contemporary status of the idea of radicalism in sketching the historical transformations of its underlying metaphors as well as in reconstructing the changeable ideological background, that determined the diversified political meaning of that idea. Insofar as the idea of radicalism, according to the author, related from the very beginning to both fundamental domains of human practice, the political and the cognitive, the main presumption of the analysis undertaken in the article is that in current times radicalism turns out to be the burning issue as the lost jewel of both political and philosophical identity*

Key words: radicalism, antinomy, ideology, christianity

### 1

Radicalism, a term which once 'moved the masses' and carried the pathos of enlightenment and emancipation,<sup>2</sup> appears well-worn today and at best evokes a shrug of the shoulders. In politics it functions as a media format, a costume in which 'empty'<sup>3</sup> gestures are performed and which is donned for purposes of recognisability by a selected segment of the votership. Commonly (outside this chosen voter segment), radicalism is perceived as a fanatic stance which ignores the complexity of reality, striving to cut it down to someone's ideas – or, rather, idiosyncrasies. It is in this purely formal meaning, indistinguishable from extremism or fundamentalism, that the term radicalism is used in reference to all movements and groups of the anti-establishment type, i.e., those that aim

<sup>1</sup> First published as 'Radykalizm jako idea antynomiczna', in Mateusz Falkowski, ed., *Myślenie dziś*, vol. 2, Fundacja na Rzecz Myślenia im. Barbary Skargi, Warszawa 2014, s. 63-68.

<sup>2</sup> Karl Marx, *A Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right*, 'Introduction', in Joseph J. O'Malley, ed., assisted by Richard A. Davis, *Marx: Early Political Writings*, (Cambridge UP, 1994).

<sup>3</sup> Jürgen Habermas, *Gesty radykalizmu są dziś puste*, 'Krytyka Polityczna', no. 11-12/2007.

RADICALISM AS AN ANTINOMIC IDEA

to redefine the political *status quo*, be it against public opinion or binding international relations.<sup>4</sup> Also in philosophy, especially the kind that sees itself as an *ancilla politicae* and likes to wait at the doors of politicians' offices (inviting brutal exploitation), radicalism is today more a theatrical prop<sup>5</sup> than an element of well-intended and substantial self-definition.

Of course in the case of both politics and philosophy one can ask if radicalism's present obsolescence is not perhaps the effect of its dismissal as – to use Lenin's words – a kind of 'infant disorder'.<sup>6</sup> While Lenin's political pediatrics aimed to uphold the revolution's achievement of a bureaucratic real-socialist system and safeguard it from the fervent messianism of Western leftist parties, today this question appears to be inspired by a certain kind of unspoken historical teleology. In response to the left- and right-wing radicalism that was very visible in Germany in the early 1920s, Helmuth Plessner had already observed that radicalism was the inborn world outlook of impatient people – in the sociological sense the lower classes and in the biological sense young people.<sup>7</sup> In the contemporary era, which in answer to the question 'who are you?' tends to halt in a fatalistic pose, suggesting a time without gods or prophets<sup>8</sup> (which already Max Weber adopted and held for many), the term radicalism only evokes remorse. In our day it carries haunting suggestions of modernity as an unfinished historical project,<sup>9</sup> hence modernity is all the more eager to define itself as post-modern and post-historical, and is reluctant to use it.

Quite certainly one could list many a radical project and 'final solution' which not only should have been abandoned as quickly as possible, but which it would have been best never to initiate. The body's local memory has good reasons to approach radicalism with caution, sensing in it not so much a surge of the heart as covert provocation. Indeed, although Marx concedes that 'Hegel remarks somewhere that all great world-historic facts and personages appear, so to speak, twice', he rightly notes that, 'He forgot to add: the

<sup>4</sup> 'Up until the 1970s the terms left-wing radicalism and right-wing radicalism were often used synonymously with the term extremism, in part also in order to define a softer form of extremism. According to many political lexicons radicalism moves within the constitutional area while radicalism transgresses it. Today the notion of radicalism has almost disappeared from public and scientific language', trans. from: Hans-Gerd Jaschke, *Politischer Extremismus*, (Wiesbaden: Springer, 2006), 17.

<sup>5</sup> Andrzej Leder, *Współczesny radykalizm polityczny*, 'Przegląd Polityczny' no. 119 (2013), 13.

<sup>6</sup> Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, 'Left-Wing' Communism: an Infantile Disorder in *Collected Works*, Volume 31, trans. Julius Katzer, (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1964).

<sup>7</sup> Helmuth Plessner, *The Limits of Community. A Critique of Social Radicalism*, trans. Andrew Wallace, (New York: Prometheus Books 1999).

<sup>8</sup> Max Weber, *Science as Vocation*, in *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, trans. and ed. Hans Henrik Gerth, and Charles Wright Mills, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1946).

<sup>9</sup> Jürgen Habermas, *Modernity: an Unfinished Project*, in Maurizio Passerin d'Entrèves and Seyla Benhabib, ed., *Habermas and the Unfinished Project of Modernity*, (Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1997).

ANDRZEJ GNIAZDOWSKI

first time as tragedy, the second time as farce.<sup>10</sup> Consequently, ought radicalism today not remain at best a domain of the history of ideas – also against those few romantics who are striving to revive leftist radicalism after three decades of neo-liberalism?<sup>11</sup> Instead of adopting a *fides querens intellectum* stance towards radicalism, would it not be more sensible to preclude the possibility of its embodiment on the contemporary ideological map?

Almost a century ago radicalism became a justified object of criticism for Helmuth Plessner as a sociological and social-ethical problem, and today it is a no less burning issue as a lost jewel of both political and philosophical identity. Undeniably, from its very beginnings the radicalism concept carried reference to both fundamental spheres of praxis, political and cognitive. As Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno quite undialectically admitted, 'We have no doubt – and herein lies our *petitio principii* – that freedom in society is inseparable from enlightenment thinking.'<sup>12</sup> What seems to be worth asking about in the face of today's destruction of not only the radicalism of freedom but also the radicalism of truth, is the idea of the integrality of radicalism which, in the footsteps of St. John, also influences present-day public opinion. Tracking down the antinomy contained in this concept could perhaps prove helpful in defining the limits within which the concepts of truth and freedom are able to retain their sense today.

The present reflections have a more modest and mainly preparatory aim. Radicalism today being a rather hazy notion, its critique on these pages will address it as a problem on the one hand related to the history of ideas, and on the other to the sociology of knowledge. The path to defining the contemporary status of the radicalism idea will lead through a review of the historical transformations which underlie its metaphoric, equally within the context of the ideological changes which gave the concept various political interpretations over time. A blasphemous from the point of view of 'thinking of Being', heuristic premise here will be the assumption that, as Karl Mannheim says, thought does not descend on humans like an absolute but evolves as an integral part of the historical process,<sup>13</sup> and the *petitio principii* will be based on the belief that only criticism of integral radicalism as an antinomic idea, bound on one side by the legitimacy of power and on the other by the legitimacy of knowledge in their irremovable conflict, is able to tear the theological hood off this process.

<sup>10</sup> Karl Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, trans. Daniel de Leon, published online by Socialist Labor Party of America ([www.slp.org](http://www.slp.org)), December 2003.

<sup>11</sup> Jonathan Pugh, ed., *What is Radical Politics Today?* (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 2.

<sup>12</sup> Max Horkheimer, Theodor Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, ed. Gunzelin Schmid Noerr, trans. Edmund Jephcott, (Stanford UP, 2002), xvi.

<sup>13</sup> Karl Mannheim, *Conservatism: A Contribution to the Sociology of Knowledge*, trans. David Kettler, ed. David Kettler, Volker Meja, Nico Stehr, (Abingdon: Routledge, 1986).

RADICALISM AS AN ANTINOMIC IDEA

2

As Marx said in his well-known quote, 'to be radical is to grasp the root of the matter'.<sup>14</sup> Here Marx does not only mean 'radical' in the sense derived from the Latin term *radix* (root), which Campe's German dictionary of foreign terms defined as 'proceeding or reaching to the very roots. May be Germanised in conjunction with the word ground'.<sup>15</sup> In Marx's case the meaning is polemic in character and directed against the interpretation of the term that was forming in Germany at the time. Five years before the 1848 revolution it enjoyed exceptional popularity, comparable only to the status it acquired in the later Weimar Republic. However, while in this short-lived 'republic without republicans' even the conservative parties presented themselves as revolutionary, in Marx's day, with public opinion only beginning to develop a political awareness, radicalism was a word which was still seeking its place. Rejected by some and appropriated by others, in both cases it was endowed with a more or less concrete meaning.

Therefore, in order to explicate the sense given to the term both by leftist and rightist radicals, we must try to reconstruct its meaning in the pre-Marxian era. And in doing so, we must distinguish the history of radicalism as a concept, which focuses on the changing connotations of the word (which itself remains unchanged),<sup>16</sup> from the history of the radicalism idea. Whereby the object of the latter can be radicalism understood either as a certain kind of *unit-idea*<sup>17</sup> which transgresses the field's conceptual range, or as a comprehensive and typologically diversified world outlook.<sup>18</sup> While non-conceptualised radicalism can justifiably be said to have evolved already in the waning phase of the slash-and-burn agriculture era, the concept of radicalism with its inner transformations and various applications – not only in politics or philosophy but also in e.g., medicine, chemistry and algebraic geometry<sup>19</sup> – should, in keeping with the herein-adopted distinction, be viewed as a relatively recent development. However, the radical world outlook and its typological variations can be traced over history only insofar as

<sup>14</sup> Karl Marx, *A Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right, Introduction*, trans. Joseph O'Malley (Oxford UP, 1970), 5.

<sup>15</sup> Joachim Heinrich Campe, *Wörterbuch zur Erklärung und Verdeutschung der unserer Sprache aufgedrungenen fremden Wörter*, (Braunschweig: Schulbuchhandlung, 1813), 514.

<sup>16</sup> Reinhart Koselleck, 'Introduction and Prefaces to the *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe*', *Contributions to the History of Concepts* no. 6 (winter 2011), 1-37.

<sup>17</sup> Arthur Oncken Lovejoy, *The Great Chain of Being: A Study of the History of an Idea* (Harvard UP, 2005).

<sup>18</sup> For this distinction, which polemises with Lovejoy's understanding of the history of ideas, Andrzej Walicki, *Leszek Kolakowski and the Warsaw School of the History of Ideas*, reprinted in this volume, 124.

<sup>19</sup> Wilhelm Goerd, 'Radikalismus' in Joachim Ritter, ed., *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie*, vol. 8, (Basel: Schwabe Verlag, 1992), 11.

ANDRZEJ GNIAZDOWSKI

contemporary historians are able to identify the communities which were the carriers of a given kind of radicalism.<sup>20</sup>

These strategies are indeed hard to separate in daily scholarly praxis. On the one hand, all attempts to define the radicalism idea must doubtlessly derive from an analysis of its historical conceptualisations. On the other, however, this does not mean that radicalism as a concept has no prehistory which preceded its more clearly constituted forms. As Leszek Kołakowski noted in his explication of the possibility of researching the history of Marxism in the era before Marx, historical-philosophical reflection must steer clear of two extreme forms of historical nihilism: the systematic reduction of all philosophical inquiry to a set of eternally repeated questions, and its confinement to grasping only the singularities of a given phenomenon.<sup>21</sup> In reference to the history of radicalism this means that concern for a possibly most precise description of the bonds between radicalism's various conceptualisations and the uniqueness of their times does not grant exemption from the necessity to portray them as answers to 'certain fundamental questions that philosophers have posed for centuries in one form or another.'<sup>22</sup>

Consequently, in order to reconstruct the history of the radicalism idea, one should first create interpretational tools to give such a reconstruction sense and clarity. One should try to look at this history through the prism of model-concepts or ideal types abstracted from the historical subject-matter, which would attribute identification criteria and ordering principles to the individual conceptualisations of the radicalism idea and the various kinds of radical ideologies.<sup>23</sup> The expected effect of such a strategy would be – in analogy to the strategy adopted by Kołakowski in reference to the historical forms of non-confessional Christianity – the reduction of radicalism to the antinomic nature of the primary concepts which constitute it.<sup>24</sup> Approaching the radicalism idea by means of, as Leszek Kołakowski would put it, a duality dialectic – and in momentary abstraction from the factual historical course of events – could perhaps also enable the formulation of certain fundamental antinomies in radical thought.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>20</sup> Andrzej Walicki, *The Slavophile Controversy. History of a Conservative Utopia in Nineteenth-Century Russian Thought*, trans. by Hilda Andrews-Rusiecka, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975).

<sup>21</sup> Leszek Kołakowski, *Main Currents of Marxism: Its Rise, Growth and Dissolution, Vol. 1: The Founders*, trans. Paul S. Falla (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975).

<sup>22</sup> Kołakowski, *Main Currents of Marxism*, 9.

<sup>23</sup> Leszek Kołakowski, *Świadomość religijna i więź kościelna. Studia nad chrześcijaństwem bezwyznaniowym XVII wieku*, (Warsaw: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1997), 252.

<sup>24</sup> Kołakowski, *Świadomość religijna i więź kościelna*, 7.

<sup>25</sup> Kołakowski, *Świadomość religijna i więź kościelna*, 7.

RADICALISM AS AN ANTINOMIC IDEA

3

The Kantian concept of 'radical evil' throws an important light on the historical context through which radicalism was viewed as *verbum tremendum et fascinans* already in Marx's day and is similarly viewed today. Here, in one of the first recorded applications of the word in Germany, the meaning of 'radical' is quite remote from its contemporary understanding.<sup>26</sup> Kant's description of a certain bias towards evil, towards transgressing moral norms, that is inherent to human freedom as 'the radical evil of human nature'<sup>27</sup> exemplifies the word's basic understanding, which restricts its meaning to 'deeply rooted', 'well established', or 'primal'. Insofar as Kant perceives radical evil thus understood as an element of being human and not a diabolical revolt against moral laws, it is not 'radically evil' in the contemporary understanding of the word 'radical'.<sup>28</sup> Nonetheless, the frequent use of the adjective 'radical' as an attribute of evil and the later inclusion of this understanding in 19<sup>th</sup>-century dictionary definitions of the term did not remain without influence on its applications in the social and political sphere. Its connotations were especially negative in Germany.<sup>29</sup>

Kant's use of the word reveals the historical background of the radicalism idea and its metaphoric, which also determines its modern enlightenment and emancipatory connotation. The concept of radical evil based on radicalism's primary meaning related to original sin and its contamination of human nature – which Saint Augustine had already described as *origine depravata, velut radice corrupta*<sup>30</sup> – and thereby also refers indirectly to the symbol of the cosmic tree or tree of life, which was present already in Neolithic cultures<sup>31</sup> and, as an image of a periodically self-renewing world or human community itself, appears in the Book of Genesis to depict the history of man's fall and salvation.<sup>32</sup> The Tree of Life is also mentioned in the Book of Revelation as growing 'down the middle of the great street of the city. On each side of the river', 'bearing twelve crops of fruit', 'yielding

<sup>26</sup> Peter Wende, 'Radikalismus', in Otto Brunner, Wilhelm Conze, Reinart Koselleck, eds., *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe. Historisches Lexikon zur politisch-sozialen Sprache in Deutschland*, vol. 5, (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1984), 114.

<sup>27</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Religion Within the Boundary of Pure Reason*, trans. John W. Semple, (Edinburgh: Thomas Clark, 1838), 43.

<sup>28</sup> Cezary Wodziński, *Światłocienie zła*, (Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego, 1998), 22.

<sup>29</sup> Peter Wende, 'Radikalismus', 114.

<sup>30</sup> Augustinus, *De Civ. Dei*, XIII, 14.

<sup>31</sup> Mircea Eliade, *A History of Religious Ideas*, vol. I, *From the Stone Age to the Eleusinian Mysteries*, trans. Willard Trask, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978).

<sup>32</sup> 'Roots in the soil, trunk on the ground, growth upwards, yearly 'deaths' and renewed blooming served as a metaphor of human life', Renate Brandscheidt, 'Lebensbaum', in *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche Bd. 6*, (Freiburg: Verlag Herder, 1997), 723ff.

ANDRZEJ GNIAZDOWSKI

its fruit every month', and with leaves serving 'for the healing of the nations';<sup>33</sup> and has become the subject of complex interpretation not only in Christian theology but also in the Kabbalah. Saint Bonaventure's theology of the cross as *lignum vitae*,<sup>34</sup> the sephiroth in Chassidism and the pathos of grasping the root of the matter in Marx inscribe themselves in equal measure in the long shadow this tree casts over history.

Also Helmuth Plessner in his critique of social radicalism concludes that evangelical Christianity with its awareness of original sin, or man's fall, is one of the incentives for radicalism. For Plessner the radicalism of early Christianity was a response to the evangelical proclamation of the dualistic severance of spirit and earth as opposing and unreconcilable entities, and the related appeal for life in accord with spirit, the path to which was opened by Christ's sacrifice, which healed mankind from radical evil.<sup>35</sup> In his presentation of Marx's thought as an answer to the experience of man's fundamental frailty and the insurmountable 'disability' of his existence, Leszek Kołakowski also devotes much attention to its relation to the question about the origin of evil and the answers Christian theology provided to that question.<sup>36</sup> Kołakowski sees the original historical meaning of radicalism as human liberation from evil as a dispute about the role mercy and free will play in its uprooting. From his perspective the radicalism concept in all its historical conceptualisations appears to be tied to the refusal to accept that evil cannot be eradicated by human effort, and that we are incurably contaminated by evil, which only God is able to cleanse us of if He so desires.<sup>37</sup>

#### 4

In this context Helmuth Plessner not incorrectly concluded that showing the sources of radicalism in spiritual history would require tracing the history of the modern world from its very beginnings.<sup>38</sup> In an analysis of the political consequences of Saint Augustine's and Pelagius's dispute over the role of free will in salvation contained in his study of Pascal's religiousness, Leszek Kołakowski also stated that from the 16<sup>th</sup> century on, or even from the Middle Ages, the entire history of millenarian and utopian thought was consciously or unconsciously tied to a Pelagian mentality.<sup>39</sup> Calling this thought radicalism

<sup>33</sup> Rev 22, 2.

<sup>34</sup> Bonaventura, 'Lignum Vitae', in Christiana Mülling, ed., *Der Baum des Lebens. Ein Arbeits- und Exerzitienbuch zur Franziskanischen Spiritualität*, Paderborn 2002, 274–318.

<sup>35</sup> Plessner, *The Limits of Community*.

<sup>36</sup> Kołakowski, *Main Currents of Marxism*, 18–23.

<sup>37</sup> Leszek Kołakowski, *God Owes Us Nothing: A Brief Remark on Pascal's Religion and on the Spirit of Jansenism*, (Chicago UP, 1995).

<sup>38</sup> Plessner, *The Limits of Community*.

<sup>39</sup> Kołakowski, *God Owes Us Nothing*.

RADICALISM AS AN ANTINOMIC IDEA

may be considered outdated, but there is no doubt that, in order to grasp the pre-history of radicalism as a concept from the sphere of the history of philosophy and political thought, it would be essential to trace the history of other conceptualisations of the idea of human alienation and the possibility of man's return to himself through self-salvation. Insofar as the modern-day radicalism concept is considered to be wholly inscribed into the history of political messianism,<sup>40</sup> its beginnings should – in the footsteps of, among others, Karl Löwith – be already sought in Judeo-Christian chiliasm and apocalyptic speculations on the salvatory sense of history.<sup>41</sup> And outside this tradition in the Manichean dualism of the battle between Good and Evil<sup>42</sup> or – as Eric Voegelin – in the inner-worldly eschatology of gnosis.<sup>43</sup>

Especially Voegelin regarded gnosis not only as a certain historical form of religious consciousness – the kind that sees knowledge as a means of attaining salvation<sup>44</sup> – but also as an interpretational tool with regard to the history of modern political thought. In Voegelin's approach gnosis can be treated as the model or essence of such thought to the extent in which man uses it to confer tokens of divinity upon himself and thus, by replacing faith in the Christian sense by a more thorough participation in divinity, furthers the concept of social divinisation.<sup>45</sup> Although Voegelin as well saw the roots of modernity deeply embedded in medieval millenarian sects, in his interpretation the new era in western history was opened by the Reformation, when the gnostic movement effectively invaded western institutions.<sup>46</sup> Voegelin saw a model example of the 'gnostic revolution', which strove for a fundamental transformation of human nature and human society, primarily in the influence of the Puritans on public order in England. In his view their image was excellently applicable to the later gnostic revolutionaries.<sup>47</sup>

In his book *The Revolution of the Saints: A Study in the Origins of Radical Politics* Michael Walzer explicitly recognises English Puritanism as the source of contemporary radical politics, and does not hesitate to view the Puritans anachronically as the historical

<sup>40</sup> Jacob Leib Talmon, *Political Messianism: The Romantic Phase*, (Boulder: Westview Press, 1985).

<sup>41</sup> Karl Löwith, *Meaning in History: The Theological Implications of the Philosophy of History*, (Chicago UP, 1949).

<sup>42</sup> Calling upon the testimony of Theodoret, Pierre Chaunu notes that Mani 'called light the good tree that bears good fruit, and dark matter (...) the bad tree that bears fruit connected with its roots', Pierre Chaunu, *Le Temps des réformes. Histoire religieuse et système de civilisation: La crise de la chrétienté, l'éclatement (1250-1550)*, (Paris: Fayard, 1976).

<sup>43</sup> Eric Voegelin, *The New Science of Politics: An Introduction*, (University UP, 1952).

<sup>44</sup> Hans Jonas, *The Gnostic Religion: The Message of the Alien God & the Beginnings of Christianity*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1958).

<sup>45</sup> Voegelin, *The New Science of Politics*.

<sup>46</sup> Voegelin, *The New Science of Politics*.

<sup>47</sup> Voegelin, *The New Science of Politics*.

ANDRZEJ GNIAZDOWSKI

antecedents of the modern-day democrats, socialists and communists.<sup>48</sup> According to Walzer their construction of an ideal radicalism was the effect of certain key ideas they shared, which were incompatible with the traditional class social system. Among the most essential of these ideas was that 'specially designated and organised bands of men might play a creative part in the political world, destroying the established order and reconstructing society according to the Word of God or the plans of their fellows.'<sup>49</sup> Consequently, in Walzer's view the history of radicalism and party politics understood as a certain methodical activity appears relatively brief when compared to the history of politics as a struggle for power between factions, intrigue or open warfare, and belongs entirely to the modern, post-medieval political world.

Walzer believes that the beginnings of politics in the modern understanding can be linked to other 16<sup>th</sup>-century conceptual breakthroughs. In his opinion such breakthroughs included Machiavelli's new political realism, Luther's attacks on 'Roman internationalism' or Jean Bodin's conception of the sovereignty of the new monarchs.<sup>50</sup> However, Walzer notes, radical politics was alien to all three insofar as they based their political renewal projects on a 'prince' – either as an adventurer, a Christian jurist or a hereditary bureaucrat. All others 'remained subjects, condemned to political passivity.'<sup>51</sup> Thus, Walzer observes, regardless of the revolutionary import of their thought, the evolution of modern politics and statehood would be unthinkable without the underlying 'revolutionary activity of saints and citizens.'<sup>52</sup> As Walzer points out, the old order in Switzerland, the Netherlands, Scotland, and most of all England and later France, was not overthrown by absolutist rulers or in the name of the reason of state, but by groups of political radicals guided by new revolutionary ideologies.

## 5

Regardless of how far back the radical tradition may go from the perspective of the history of ideas, the usage of the terms 'radical' and 'radically' in modern national languages seen through the prism of the history of concepts was first recorded in 16<sup>th</sup>-century English.<sup>53</sup> At that time it still retained the same basic, neutral meaning it represented for Saint

<sup>48</sup> Michael Walzer, *The Revolution of the Saints. A Study in the Origins of Radical Politics*, (Harvard UP, 1965), 1.

<sup>49</sup> Walzer, *The Revolution of the Saints*, 1.

<sup>50</sup> Jean Bodin, *Six Books of the Commonwealth*, trans. Marian J. Tooley, (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1955).

<sup>51</sup> Walzer, *The Revolution of the Saints*, 2.

<sup>52</sup> Walzer, *The Revolution of the Saints*, 2.

<sup>53</sup> Goerdts, 'Radikalismus', 11.

RADICALISM AS AN ANTINOMIC IDEA

Augustine and, later, Kant,<sup>54</sup> and did not acquire political connotations (connected with support for electoral law reforms in England) until the turn of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries.<sup>55</sup> It was then that the negative label 'radicals' was first used to describe a group of politically-committed Utilitarianists, whose leading figures were Jeremy Bentham and James – and subsequently John Stuart Mill.<sup>56</sup> The fact that as advocates of more democratic electoral laws they were initially thus described only by their opponents clearly indicates that it was only then that English public opinion began to use the term as a political concept. Also the *Oxford English Dictionary* fails to mention radicalism in this sense before 1820,<sup>57</sup> but one may assume that the term's political conceptualisation was based on an idea whose evolution had begun earlier, even if it was differently expressed.

An important indication in the search for this idea is the adoption of the term 'philosophical radicalism' to describe English Utilitarianism.<sup>58</sup> This shows that there was a need to distinguish this doctrine from radicalism *tout court* as a specific kind of radicalism. As Elie Halévy observes, Utilitarianism as a moral arithmetic developed to substantiate and provide a mathematical base for the legal sciences, especially with regard to the theory of criminal law and, as in the case of Adam Smith, Malthus and Ricard, political economy, had to be recognised as radicalism when it became an organised philosophical doctrine. According to Halévy the deciding factor here was that the natural context for the formation of philosophical radicalism in England was the French Revolution taking place across the English Channel: 'to the juristic and spiritualistic philosophy of the Rights of Man corresponded the Utilitarian philosophy of the identity of interests.'<sup>59</sup>

To the extent in which the French opponents of the Great Revolution saw the principles of 1789 as the work of philosophers,<sup>60</sup> the emancipatory philosophy of the Enlightenment from Voltaire to Rousseau which paved the way for it should also be viewed as a harbinger of philosophical radicalism. In all probability this deliberately negative view of Utilitarianism was also the effect of the impact on English public opinion of Edmund Burke's critique of the abstract, political-reality-distant character of the French Revolution.<sup>61</sup> In fact, however, it would be closer to the nature of both French Enlightenment philosophy and Utilitarianism to describe them rather as a political than a philosophical radicalism.

<sup>54</sup> Glenn Burgess, Matthew Festenstein, eds., *English Radicalism 1550-1850*, (Cambridge UP, 2007), 90.

<sup>55</sup> Wende, 'Radikalismus', 117.

<sup>56</sup> Elie Halévy, *The Growth of Philosophic Radicalism*, trans. Mary De Selincourt Morris, (Eastford: Martino Fine Books, 2012).

<sup>57</sup> Burgess, Festenstein, *English Radicalism 1550-1850*, 1.

<sup>58</sup> Joseph Hamburger, *Intellectuals in Politics: John Stuart Mill and the Philosophical Radicals*, (New Haven: Yale UP, 1965).

<sup>59</sup> Halévy, *The Growth of Philosophic Radicalism*, XVI.

<sup>60</sup> Jerzy Szacki, *Kontrrewolucyjne paradoksy. Wizje świata francuskich antagonistów Wielkiej Rewolucji 1789-1815*, (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo IFiS PAN, 2012), 32f.

<sup>61</sup> Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the French Revolution*, (London: M. Dent & Sons, 1910).

ANDRZEJ GNIAZDOWSKI

In its plea for the removal of all artificial barriers which traditional institutions imposed upon individuals and the social restraints built upon the assumption that people had to be protected against themselves and each other, Utilitarianism, though different in inspiration and principle, was akin to French emancipatory philosophy in its political applications. Seen from this perspective, the study of the historical and logical sources of philosophical radicalism appear also for Halévy to be 'a chapter in the philosophy of history as well as a chapter in the history of philosophy'.<sup>62</sup>

Paradoxically the concept of radicalism as a political doctrine is historically subsequent to philosophical radicalism, appearing only after the July revolution in France. In reference to the English radicals, it was used to describe the extra-parliamentary opposition, which itself used the term *parti republicain*.<sup>63</sup> It was only after France censored this republican connotation that this opposition, initially grouped around Alexandre Ledru-Rollin, and later Leon Gambetta, adopted the political radicalism concept for its own, thus giving birth to the tradition of the French *Parti Radical*.<sup>64</sup> It was also then that the first efforts were undertaken to give the term a positive meaning. In Krug's 1833 dictionary, which was the first to run 'political radicalism' as an entry, its reference was to radical curation as opposed to palliative treatment. The term applied to all efforts to heal the state from the fundamentals, which, as was skeptically remarked, could hardly be done without revolution.<sup>65</sup> Already in the *Dictionnaire politique* published in 1842 by the French Radical Party, which was contemporary to the Marxian definition, radicalism was described as a doctrine of innovation based on awareness and reason.<sup>66</sup>

## 6

The distinction between philosophical and political radicalism is especially necessary in reconstructing the historical context in which the meaning of the term evolved in Germany, primarily in view of the fact that in politics, as already observed by Marx, the Germans achieved in thought what other nations achieved in deed.<sup>67</sup> Where the political relations in England and France, whose unbiased description was what allowed also German political observers to legally transform the word into a concept, suggested that this distinction was solely a difference in name, in Germany it had far more essential

<sup>62</sup> Halévy, *The Growth of Philosophic Radicalism*, XVI.

<sup>63</sup> Wende, 'Radikalismus', 117.

<sup>64</sup> Gérard Baal, *Histoire du radicalisme*, (Paris: La Découverte, 1994).

<sup>65</sup> Wilhelm Traugott Krug, *Allgemeines Handwörterbuch der philosophischen Wissenschaften*, Bd. 3, (Leipzig: F. U. Brodhaus, 1833), 413.

<sup>66</sup> Wende, 'Radikalismus', 117.

<sup>67</sup> Marx, *A Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right, Introduction*.

RADICALISM AS AN ANTINOMIC IDEA

reasons. As Marx wrote in 1843, in Germany radical revolution encountered an essential obstacle as such revolution could only be inspired by radical needs, for which there appeared to fail both reason and a fertile ground.<sup>68</sup>

Also in the context of the history of the radicalism concept, defining political and philosophical radicalism as the two basic forms of radicalism can only have a purely heuristic sense. Insofar as the conceptual distinction between these two types of radicalism and their repletion with doctrinal content also failed to take effect on this side of the Rhine, such a definition can only refer to their ideal forms. These in turn may be constructed as interpretational tools from an initial analysis of the sense of the historical forms of radicalism, e.g., the Marxian distinction between a socially-rooted people's revolution and the exclusively hydroponic revolution that takes place in a philosopher's mind.<sup>69</sup> Thus, they are only applicable in scholarly praxis to define the boundaries of radicalism as such, as well as its possible conceptualisations.

The distinction between political and philosophical radicalism can be made upon the assumption that in modern philosophy and modern political thought being radical always meant reaching to the roots of two different things, and in both cases took on the form of the question *quid iuris?* Their sense was determined by inquiry into the legitimacy of, on the one hand, the political, and, on the other, the cognitive *status quo*, a confrontation with the problem of legitimising power, or legitimising knowledge. Whereas the specific sense of philosophical radicalism, whose modern-day paradigm rests on the methodical philosophical model introduced by Descartes, lay in the critique of metaphysics and reference to the primal obviousness of the cognising 'I' as the fundament of the legitimacy of cognition, the content of political radicalism came to focus on the critique of political order, reaching to the roots or 'reasons' of statehood (*Staatsräson*) as the modern form of organising government. Thus, the idealising typologisation of both forms of radicalism is founded on the basic – though purely formal – meaning acquired on their ground by respectively the subjectivity and the sovereignty category. From this perspective the various conceptualisations of both philosophical and political radicalism can be distinguished to answer the question how both categories can be defined on their basis, and what *differentia specifica* decide about their identifications.

When we speak about radicalism in the plural it is worth remembering that already the distinction between the Tree of Life and the Tree of Knowledge in the story of the Garden of Eden in the Book of Genesis is based on essential theological argumentation.<sup>70</sup> Similarly, the distinction between two ideal types of radicalism does not close but opens the path to investigating the kinds of relations that take place between them. One such

<sup>68</sup> Marx, *A Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right, Introduction*.

<sup>69</sup> Marx, *A Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right, Introduction*.

<sup>70</sup> Brandscheidt, 'Lebensbaum', 723.

ANDRZEJ GNIAZDOWSKI

well-trodden path, enabled by the generalisation of the Marxian thesis that consciousness is determined by a social being, involves approaching the radicalism concept through the prism of a sociology of knowledge. As Max Scheler noted in his writings on the subject, the one-sidedness of the Enlightenment era lay in that it only recognised the conditioning of society by knowledge. For Scheler, the great discovery of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries lay in showing that knowledge was also conditioned by society.<sup>71</sup>

In reference to the radicalism idea this means that Karl Mannheim's 'style of thought' category can prove a useful method by which to investigate the main types and historical conceptualisations of radicalism. This involves acceptance that the key to understanding change in thought is the changing social context, especially the fate of social classes and groups, which are the social carriers of thought styles.<sup>72</sup> Seen this way, calling the English Utilitarianists' political doctrine 'philosophical radicalism' becomes understandable to the extent in which the *differentia specifica* underlying its identification is the style of thought of a doctrinally organised group of philosophers functioning as the English equivalent of the French *republique des lettres*. The sociology of knowledge perspective is also a good point of departure for asking if the distinction between philosophical and political radicalism is really only a question of naming or whether it does not also involve an antinomy in the idea itself, rooted not so much in the thought style but in the essence of its matter.

## 7

In view of the limits of the sociology of knowledge set by Max Scheler – especially his critique of sociologism as theory-cognitive reductionism which does not distinguish forms of thought from forms of being<sup>73</sup> – it appears arguable to begin the quest for the discriminants of the individual styles of radical thought by analysing their metaphoric. The best-known metaphorical representation of the sense of radicalism in philosophy is Descartes' comparison of philosophy to a tree in which, 'the roots are metaphysics, the trunk is physics, and the branches that issue from the trunk are all the other sciences.'<sup>74</sup> From then on the sense of the cognitive-theoretical critique of metaphysics was determined by the striving for 'radicalisation', a deeper rooting of the Cartesian methodical doubt programme, therefore the metaphor of cognition as a tree returned also in historically later forms of philosophical radicalism.

<sup>71</sup> Max Scheler, *Problems of a Sociology of Knowledge*, trans. Manfred S. Frings, (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1980).

<sup>72</sup> Mannheim, *Conservatism*.

<sup>73</sup> Scheler, *Problems of a Sociology of Knowledge*.

<sup>74</sup> Quote after Martin Heidegger, *Introduction to 'What is Metaphysics?'*, trans. Walter Kaufmann, in Martin Heidegger, *Pathmarks*, (Cambridge University Press, 1998), 277.

RADICALISM AS AN ANTINOMIC IDEA

It appears in the introduction to Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, where Kant, in an effort to reveal the fundament of all possible knowledge, assumes that 'human cognition has two stems', and simultaneously observes that they 'perhaps spring from a common root, though one unknown to us'.<sup>75</sup> The roots metaphor is referred to in a programmatic article by Edmund Husserl, who states that philosophy 'is essentially a science of true beginnings, or origins, of *rizomata panton*'.<sup>76</sup> In identifying philosophy as an exact science with a 'science of the radical', which as such also 'had to be radical in its procedure', Husserl silently continued Fichte's earlier efforts to radicalise Kantian critical philosophy.<sup>77</sup> In this, he stated that also phenomenology as a critique of metaphysics 'could not cease until it developed its own absolutely clear beginnings, i.e., its absolutely clear issues, methods determined by its own understanding of these issues, and the most basic work field in the form of absolutely clearly given things'.<sup>78</sup>

From the point of view of the metaphoric of philosophical radicalism its boundaries are determined by the relation of its historical conceptualisations to those styles of philosophical thought that purport to be radically different from it, and in the first place to Hegel's critique of Kant, in which neither this metaphoric nor the radicalism concept appear at all.<sup>79</sup> Jürgen Habermas' related question as to whether this critique should be considered a radicalisation of the cognition theory or its abolition<sup>80</sup> is all the more justified with regard to Martin Heidegger's attempt to overcome metaphysics. In the introduction to his 1949-renewed question about its essence, Heidegger openly referred to the Cartesian metaphor of knowledge as a tree to present, precisely on this basis, the sense of thought which thinks the truth of being. 'In what soil – he asked – 'do the roots of the tree of philosophy take hold? Out of what ground do the roots, and thereby the whole tree, receive their nourishing juices and strength?'<sup>81</sup>

Seen through the prism of the metaphor Heidegger resorted to, being as an 'element of the soil', and the roots of metaphysics that entrust themselves to it, stand in a dialectical relation, therefore it appears indicated to apply it as an interpretational tool also to the Marxian definition of the meaning of radicalism. Where leftist radicals tend to regard Marx's conceptualisation as an epiphany of integral radicalism on whose

<sup>75</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Werner S. Pluhar, (Indianapolis-Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 1996), 67.

<sup>76</sup> Edmund Husserl, *Philosophy as Rigorous Science*, trans. Quentin Lauer, in Edmund Husserl, *Phenomenology and the Crisis of Philosophy*, (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), 146.

<sup>77</sup> Marek Siemek, *Husserl i dziedzictwo filozofii transcendentalnej*, in Marek Siemek, ed., *Filozofia transcendentalna a dialektyka*, (Warszawa: Oficyna Naukowa, 1994), 268.

<sup>78</sup> Husserl, *Philosophy as Rigorous Science*, 146.

<sup>79</sup> Cf. Hermann Glockner, *Hegel-Lexikon*, vol. 4, in Georg Wilhelm Friederich Hegel, *Sämtliche Werke*, vol. 26, (Stuttgart: Frommans Verlag, 1939).

<sup>80</sup> Jürgen Habermas, *Erkenntnis und Interesse*, (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1994), 14.

<sup>81</sup> Heidegger, *Introduction to 'What is Metaphysics?'*, 277.

ANDRZEJ GNIAZDOWSKI

ground the answer to the question about the *quid iuris* of knowledge overlaps with the answer to the question about the *quid iuris* of power, losing itself 'down to the subtlest tendrils'<sup>82</sup> in the soil of the proletariat's being for itself, thinking about being in Heidegger's interpretation openly refutes all tradition of radical thought. As Heidegger remarks, 'such thinking, which recalls the truth of Being, is no longer satisfied with metaphysics, to be sure; but it does not oppose and think against metaphysics either. To return to our image, it does not tear up the root of philosophy. It tills the ground and plows the soil for this root.'<sup>83</sup> Paradoxically, the answer to the question what makes man free is the same in both cases. Because, contrary to St. John, it is not truth but – in keeping with inscriptions forged in Krupp steel – work.

<sup>82</sup> Heidegger, *Introduction to 'What is Metaphysics?'*, 278.

<sup>83</sup> Heidegger, *Introduction to 'What is Metaphysics?'*, 279.