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ELŻBIETA HAŁAS

CRISIS, CONFLICT AND THE POSSIBILITY OF A CREATIVE DEVELOPMENT OF CIVILIZATION AS CONCEIVED BY FLORIAN ZNANIECKI

“The very origin of a new civilization must be in the total course congruent with its future essence”¹

1. *F. Znaniecki's "culturalism"*

In 1900 died a great “master of suspicion”² of the fin de siècle period—Friedrich Nietzsche. The Nietzschean motif of decadency—of a fall of Western culture had to be voiced fully in the reflection of 20th century thinkers and emphasized by the tragic chords of history: by the outbreak of the First World War, by the Russian Revolution and the revolutionary wave in Europe in 1918, by the fascistization of Europe in the thirties, by the Second World War and the division of Europe and the world into antagonistic political camps. The reflections upon civilization by Oswald Spengler, Ortega y Gasset, Arnold Toynbee and Pitirim Sorokin are well known to the cultural public of Western Europe. In Europe, however, common perspectives of historical experience have never been held, and looking into the “gulf” of contemporary civilization was to become a specific privilege of the East.³ Here is where in the end Auschwitz took place—the *anus mundi*—using the words of Heinz Thilo, an SS physician⁴—the place of “clearing” the world for the fascist *Übermensch*, a caricature of the Nietzschean creative “man of the future.”⁵

Only a small part of classical East-European attainments in the social sciences has been assimilated in the West—for example, some partial translations of Leon Petrażycki had been made; works by Ludwik Gumplowicz, written in German, belong to German sociological classics. Noteworthy Polish reflections on civilization include a work by Erazm Majewski, the works of Jan K. Kochanowski, inspired by the experiences of the revolution in the Polish

¹ F. Znaniecki, *Ludzie terazniejsi a cywilizacja przyszłości* (Książnica-Atlas, Lwów-Warszawa 1934), p. 96.

² P. Ricoeur, *Egzystencja i hermeneutyka*, Transl. St. Cichowicz (PAX, Warszawa 1975), p. 80.

³ Cz. Miłosz, *Rodzina Europa* (Instytut Literacki, Paryż 1980).

⁴ A. Kępiński, *Rytm życia* (Wydawnictwo Literackie, Kraków 1973), p. 5.

⁵ Z. Kuderowicz, *Nietzsche* (Wiedza Powszechna, Warszawa 1979), p. 139.

Kingdom in 1904–1907, and most of all the works of Feliks Koneczny, beginning with his *O wielości cywilizacji* (On the Plurality of Civilizations).⁶

Florian Znaniecki (1882–1958) also belongs to this group. Znaniecki no less than Max Weber could call himself “a son of modern European culture.”⁷ He was a polyglot, erudite, and a student of universities in Switzerland and France. This eminent Polish and American scholar stated that his point of view was to a great degree influenced by the tradition of Polish historical thought. His achievements both in the Polish language and in English were among the greatest in the domain of cultural sciences, especially in sociology. His theoretical system based on the principal of the “humanistic coefficient”⁸ is based on the originally formulated “philosophy of culturalism.” He himself placed it close to the voluntarism of Nietzsche interpreted in a personal manner, and then to pragmatists, especially to John Dewey.⁹ His philosophical approach is based on assuming a historical system of reality and knowledge as well as the connection between meanings and values.¹⁰ For Znaniecki, the world of culture is similar to Weber’s and Mannheim’s:¹¹ a world dependent on the active experience of individuals and groups.

The question of integration is of primary importance in Znaniecki’s system. The idea of cultural order constitutes the horizon of all his works. It is an order based on human activities directed toward values. A special kind of order, a social one, is the proper subject-matter of sociology. It is never the order of a hypostatized system, for human actions constitute its ontological base. An ideal type of such actions is the creative action. It is formed in the manner of interpretation of relevant values. By integration Znaniecki means the interactional processes resulting in cultural order and its subsystem, i.e. social order or social organization. Thus, integration is a notion concomitant with the cultural order and social organization. It is a theoretical and non-valuative concept.

No less important, however, in Znaniecki’s works are prospective analyses which are clearly separated from purely systematic sociological considerations. They demonstrate a proper shape of order which contemporary societies should aim to achieve. Znaniecki is thus a sociologist as well as a philosopher

⁶ F. Koneczny, *On the Plurality of Civilizations*, transl. and introd. by A. Hilckman, pref. by Arnold Toynbee (Polonia Publications, London 1962).

⁷ M. Weber, *Szkie z socjologii religii* (Krajowa Agencja Wydawnicza, Warszawa 1984), p. 69.

⁸ F. Znaniecki, *The Method of Sociology* (Reinhart and Company, Inc., New York 1934), p. 36.

⁹ F. Znaniecki, *Humanizm i poznanie* (Wydawnictwo “Przeglądu Filozoficznego,” Warszawa 1912), p. 140; F. Znaniecki, *The Laws of Social Psychology* (Gebethner i Wolff, Warszawa-Kraków-Poznań 1925), p. VII.

¹⁰ F. Znaniecki, 1912, op. cit., p. 94; *The Method of Sociology* . . . , p. 364.

¹¹ K. Mannheim, *Structures of Thinking*, ed. by D. Kettler, U. Meja, N. Stehr (Routledge and Kegan Paul, London 1982), p. 85.

of culture, as reflected in his works: *Upadek cywilizacji zachodniej* (The Fall of Western Civilization),¹² *Ludzie terażniejsi a cywilizacja przyszłości* (Contemporary People and Future Civilization),¹³ as well as in *Modern Nationalities*.¹⁴

If he were to be compared to a philosopher of culture, it would be best to characterize his attempts as a creative and original elaboration of a Nietzschean thread. That is, as a defense of the creative elite but also looking for conditions permitting the spread of original creativity in the wider sphere of culture, i.e. moral, religious, economical, political and strictly social creativity—concerning modes of relationships, collective actions, successful social integrations, etc. Thus, Znaniecki's approach to the philosophy of culture does not exist merely as an intellectual contemplation of values but it consists of value implementation into culture. He is not a moralist from the point of view of a particular value system, but he grounds the possibility of positive cultural praxis in a thorough examination of various relative value-systems to discover positive universal values, e.g., peaceful integration of humanity and a creative development of culture.¹⁵ Thus, he attempts to make a critique of contemporary ideas and processes based on objective, not on ideological criteria.

2. *Surface manifestations of crisis—erosion of the leading ideals of Western civilization*

Znaniecki, like Weber, has seen the possibility of a rational investigation into the infinitely varied and thus chaotic world of human societies and cultures through the idealization of its segments from a chosen point of view.¹⁶ Constructing an ideal type of Western civilization he has put into relief and raised to a basic principle not rationality—as did Weber—but free creation.¹⁷ The ideal of free creation has been unfolding progressively in a historical process owing to the liberation of man from the determination of the conditions of nature and from the direct, external control of social and political institutions. It became manifest in continuously increasing ranges of social phenomena.¹⁸ The principle of free creation manifests itself in unfolding partially autotelic ideals. In the material sphere Znaniecki has pointed at the ideal of domination of nature through which inventiveness in itself has become a social goal, unsubordinated to production and entailing the development of new needs as well as the ideal of enlarging individual and social wealth irrespective of the form the institution of propriety can take.

¹² F. Znaniecki, *Upadek cywilizacji zachodniej. Szkic z pogranicza filozofii kultury i socjologii* (Komitet Obrony Narodowej, Poznań 1921).

¹³ F. Znaniecki, *Ludzie terażniejsi* . . .

¹⁴ F. Znaniecki, *Modern Nationalities* (University of Illinois Press, Urbana, Ill. 1952).

¹⁵ F. Znaniecki, *Modern Nationalities* . . . , pp. 500–503.

¹⁶ F. Znaniecki, 1912, op. cit., p. 187.

¹⁷ M. Weber, 1984, op. cit., p. 18.

¹⁸ F. Znaniecki, 1921, op. cit., p. 18.

The vitality of Western civilization is especially visible in the field of knowledge, where the ideal of cognition as a state, i.e. grasping of the total and ready knowledge, has been replaced by the ideal of progress by transforming science from the result—seeking to continuous creative thought, as Znaniecki observes.

In the field of morality, Znaniecki distinguished the ideal of the universal and the active compassion which aims at overcoming suffering through the amelioration of life conditions. The figure of Albert Schweitzer, a theoretical exponent as well as a practician of this ideal, may be recalled here. The principle of creativity seems to be especially strongly manifested in the domain of aesthetics where the changeability of ideals is great and in fact becomes the very principle. As a result, aesthetic ideals cannot be substantially characterized in common. One should remember that Znaniecki also considered the religious ideal as an essential component of Western civilization. He was of the opinion that the religious ideal is only superficially weakened as the existence of quasi-religious doctrines which openly reject religion emerge and become its substitute. He perceives the essence of the religious ideal not in a particular doctrine but in the active faith affirming the highest spiritual values and impelling the believer to action.

Znaniecki's political ideal deserves special attention. He acknowledged that in the political sphere the greatest achievement of Western civilization was to create a democratic national ideal. He considered nationality to be a cultural group delimited by the community of language, custom, literary tradition, and eventually also by the community of religion, art and philosophy. Such groups with the help of the political factor, *i.e.* with the state or without it, produce a conscious social solidarity and try to increase it continuously.¹⁹ Most importantly, the state in this ideal is subordinated to the nation as its tool. Thus, it ceases to be the highest form of a social being. The national ideal does not become exhausted in the achievement by the nation of an independent existence of the state. Znaniecki provides a further development of this ideal toward diminishing the discrepancy between political and social life and a gradual absorption of the state by society. Znaniecki's view of the future identity of the state and the entire social organization of the national group is a counter proposition to the utopian and/or anarchic standpoint of those who would like the state to disappear completely. According to Znaniecki, there exists a possibility of replacing the constraint and centralization, the traditional features of the state, by cooperation and federation of social associations.²⁰ It must be emphasized that the articulation of this ideal took place particularly early in Polish social thinking, not only in the thought of romantic politicians like Maurycy Mochnacki, during the period of Polish Partition, but already earlier.

¹⁹ F. Znaniecki, 1921, *op. cit.*, p. 12; *Modern Nationalities . . .*, p. 154.

²⁰ F. Znaniecki, 1921, *op. cit.*, p. 13.

It was expressed in the nobleman's civil republic, *Res Publica*, and reached such eminent minds of the Renaissance as Andrzej Frycz Modrzewski.

The pages of *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America*²¹ present the prototype of such a form of successful integration as demonstrated in the former Polish Republic where the political life was totally subordinated to the social one. It resulted in the state's being of no consequence without the voluntary cooperation of its citizens. Znaniecki emphasizes that this form of integration of autonomous society has been enforced by what he calls a "natural historical experiment" of depriving the Polish Republic of political sovereignty.

According to Znaniecki's observations, the above enumerated ideals are subject to an ongoing erosion. Critical events of political life form only a surface of the great crisis of civilization which asserts itself in the spread of materialistic world-view, of ochlocracy and racial imperialism. Znaniecki emphasizes the internal contradictions of the materialistic doctrine, which does not find any confirmation in the experiences of the world of culture or in the basis of creative activity. He perceives the success of this doctrine primarily in practical questions and specifically in its legitimization of the rejection of the control of the Church which aspires to intellectual and moral freedom. A paradoxical juncture of materialism with democratic ideals, such as freedom, according to Znaniecki, is enough evidence that materialism is not a theory but a social dogma, facilitating a coordination of beliefs and actions in its adherents. Materialistic social determinism fulfills a performative function, convincing of the unavoidability of the transformations at which one aims, being thus a kind of self-fulfilling prophecy. Other disastrous practical consequences of materialism causing crises are: the tendency to oppose and raise "manual" work over "mental" work, the tendency to overvalue the economic activity in comparison to other cultural activities and, last but not least, to give approval to sensual tendencies, turning against the European ideal of love and destroying the moral basis of marriage and family.

Znaniecki adopts Aristotle's definition of "ochlocracy" with reference to a political form warping democracy. Znaniecki, without the slightest doubt, asserts that democracy is a perfect system. It does not consist of a lack of aristocracy. On the contrary, it consists of the rule of the best, recruiting, however, from the people. As the source of the warping of democracy he recognizes incapability of acknowledging the real superiority of the qualified leaders, seeing a great danger of demagogy and unlegitimated intrusion into political affairs by fools and incompetents. Ochlocracy expresses itself in generalized antagonism toward leading social strata and toward cultural ideals and the values produced by them. Their religious, moral, political, etc. ideals are interpreted as tools of oppression of the people.

²¹ W. I. Thomas, F. Znaniecki, *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America*, vol. II (Alfred A. Knopf, New York 1927), pp. 1432–1443.

A modern national ideal excludes a destructive antagonism between nations, just to mention the watchword of the “Spring of Peoples” in 1848. Not excluding a certain rivalry, this ideal assumes that for each nation the existence of other nations is a necessity because of inescapable cultural specialization. This ideal deteriorates under the influence of what Znaniecki calls racial imperialism, *i.e.* primitive nationalism of the masses, and valorizing of one’s own ethnic distinctions. This form of nationalism is based on a tradition of the state as the highest value. In connection with it Znaniecki proclaims the necessity of an ideal of a higher civilization. As the national ideal subordinates the state to the nation, so as Znaniecki postulates, a subordination of nations to objective goals of preservation and creation of civilization occurs. Nations can be conceived of as neither racial nor as political groups, but only as cultural ones.²²

Following the development of the revolution in Russia as well as the revolutionary wave in Europe in 1918, Znaniecki spoke out against these social movements. He stated that they were in contradiction to the cultural tendencies of Western civilization, away from which the Russian Slavophiles had already turned.²³

Criticizing what he calls Bolshevism, Znaniecki does not have in mind a more or less perfect form of a communist system but a social process leading to the disintegration of existing systems. Thus, he is not thinking of principles of socialist social order as such, but of an association of a materialistic world view with a plan for a violent, revolutionary upheaval and with ochlocratic tendencies. This process, in Znaniecki’s opinion, is not limited to the countries already actively touched by revolution. He criticizes the slogans of class hatred pointing out their destructive consequences, *i.e.* liberating “pre-cultural” tendencies. Znaniecki’s misgivings were confirmed. Literary and simultaneously realistic description of a civilization falling into savagery is found in witnesses and great classics of revolutionary literature such as Izaak Babel²⁴ and Michał Bułhakow.²⁵ In Znaniecki’s 1921 critique one finds Polish intellectuals’ negative attitude toward the revolution²⁶ based on ethical and aesthetic reasons. Znaniecki’s critique does not limit itself, however, to pointing at moral problems the revolution must evoke, as Lukács does,²⁷ but it extends to the deficiencies of the modes of system integration. He perceives its main weakness in the

²² F. Znaniecki, 1921, *op. cit.*, p. 62; *Modern Nationalities . . .*, pp. 22f.

²³ K. Aksakow, “Podstawowe zasady historii Rosji” in *Rosyjska myśl filozoficzna i społeczna*, ed. Andrzej Walicki (Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, Warszawa 1961), pp. 173–197.

²⁴ I. Babel, *Utwory wybrane* (Czytelnik, Warszawa 1974).

²⁵ M. Bułhakow, *Notatki na mankietach* (Wydawnictwo Literackie, Kraków 1984).

²⁶ St. Burakowski, “Florian Znaniecki as a Representative of Thought on Civilisation” in *A Commemorative Book in Honor of Florian Znaniecki on the Centenary of his Birth*, (UAM, Poznań 1986), p. 54.

²⁷ G. Lukács, “Wybór Pism” in B. Jasiński, *Lukács* (Wiedza Powszechna, Warszawa 1985).

efforts to build social order directly upon primary groups which inevitably must lead to installing an enormous bureaucracy. According to Znaniecki, secondary groups, *i.e.* those in which participants are connected by common objective goals without entering into immediate relationships, are the basis of any developed organization of a society. Such a plurality of corporations, associations, unions, etc., however, needs a higher cultural consciousness and freedom. It must be emphasized that Znaniecki views socialism in a positive way. However, he proposes to judge it according to the way it is applied in practice.²⁸ He is of the opinion that the above ideal could really become a positive one if it could manage to connect the most complete subordination of the masses to intellectual aristocracy in the matters of production with a complete and real democratization of distribution and consumption of economic goods. Thus, it demands from the masses the capability of understanding and appreciating the intellectual aristocracy and the need for eager subordination to its guidance and from the intellectual aristocracy demands hitherto uncommon organizational and creative capability as well as a competence in guiding masses in their cultural work, not through coercion but through teaching them how to cooperate voluntarily.²⁹ As such, socialism for Znaniecki is in complete contradiction to materialism and ochlocracy and needs instead the ideal democracy. Thus, Znaniecki, in his prospective analysis of contemporary phenomena, focuses on pointing at contradictions within systems of ideas, within ongoing processes and possibly between ideas and praxis without believing in the immanent logic of the Hegelian dialectical triad of History.

3. *Deep conditions of the crisis—antagonizing principles of hitherto systems' organization*

Znaniecki takes the position that neither conservative tendencies nor revolution will resolve the vast crisis of civilization.³⁰ In spite of their apparent opposition, he notices that both conservatism and revolution are based on a static and at the same time antagonistic principle of social integration. He claims that any tendency toward a "stable equilibrium" cannot be successful. "Stable equilibrium" was connected with "folk civilizations" and aimed primarily at homogeneity and unchangeability and in imposing on all their members the same cognitive, religious, moral, political, economical etc. patterns. The principle of a "stable equilibrium" consists of ignoring or combating all kinds of innovations and is accompanied by a conviction that the relevance of a system is based upon tradition.³¹ Likewise, the so-called "static equilibrium," on which modern systems are supposed to be based, cannot endure, even if it

²⁸ F. Znaniecki, 1921, *op. cit.*, p. 105.

²⁹ F. Znaniecki, 1921, *op. cit.*, p. 105.

³⁰ F. Znaniecki, *Ludzie terażniejsi* . . . , p. 79.

³¹ F. Znaniecki, *Ludzie terażniejsi* . . . , p. 19.

were a system built in the course of a revolution.³² Since the principle of the “static equilibrium” allows transformation of the system with the introduction of new elements only when “accommodating to new trends” does it become a necessity. The above kind of equilibrium is primarily characteristic of a national civilization which is based on a tendency toward an organic unity of the system and its continuous development by accommodating it to new values and conversely accommodating values to the system. Only a limited diversity of patterns is possible in this kind of system. The principle of a “stable” or “static” equilibrium cannot be maintained in the long run if one aims at resolving modern global crises. It continues to exist due to ever increasing pluralism and constant innovations. Moreover, the principle of “static” equilibrium is associated with antagonism based on socio-cultural prejudices. These are based on a conviction about objective congruency or objective contradiction of their own and strange or foreign systems of religious, economic, political, or other values.³³ These prejudices do not come from the very essence of these systems but they have a purely social character. They spring from a negative evaluation of a certain collectivity which produces, maintains and develops these systems by another group, which is caused by negative aspects of relationships between them. Znaniecki locates the sources of crisis not in the internal contradictions among cultural systems, such as, moral, political, economic, etc., but most of all in expansive, developmental tendencies of groups.³⁴ The wish for stability and isolation has been replaced by proselytism, that is a tendency toward expansion of existing systems and their dissemination through an enlargement of their social bases, *i.e.* gaining adherents. The “Spirit of progress,” nevertheless, must also be the “spirit of struggle.” In his view the development of all contemporary systems is accomplished by a plundering expansion, which can manifest itself by denationalization of minorities, and the inclination toward loyalty to a political system by rewarding the loyal and persecuting the unloyal people. He does not see this as necessary. Some manifest examples of productive expansion, consisting of creating new values and actions and instilling positive ideals in spite of fights with the system, attest to the possibility of a peaceful development of systems.

4. *The possibility of a renewed civilization*

While preserving the significance and relevance of specific systems of values of particular groups and nations, Znaniecki proclaims at the same time the possibility of a supranational, Pan-human civilization as a persistent form of cultural and social integration of humanity. He clearly separates this ideal from the idea of cosmopolitanism as well as from internationalism. Neither the

³² F. Znaniecki, *Ludzie teraźniejsi* . . . , p. 178.

³³ F. Znaniecki, *Ludzie teraźniejsi* . . . , pp. 42, 48.

³⁴ F. Znaniecki, *Ludzie teraźniejsi* . . . , p. 48.

imperia known throughout history and built on a predominance of one nation, nor the integration based on religion which took place in Christianity or Islam nor—as it is at present in the so called “industrial civilization”—technical economic values of production and exchange produce a real social unity, and cultural unity thus becomes likewise limited. Looking for new principles of civilizing integration, he points out the necessity to spiritualize, harmonize and fluctuate civilization. He is thus of the opinion that a future civilization should be a humanistic one, with a predominance of spiritual culture, a civilization socially harmonious, free from strong antagonisms, and, most of all, fluent. It should be based on “dynamic equilibrium,” *i.e.* creativity and innovation in all cultural systems (religious, aesthetic, economic, political etc.). It would have to function normally and not evoke resistance and conflict. The very ideal of a new civilization and its propagation, Znaniecki believes, has a certain performative power. However, the basic condition of a new civilization, according to him, is, as in Nietzsche, the creation of a “new people.” For the new civilization would not be a product of an elite but an aggregate of a people acting in creative teams. A right to participate in creative cooperation would then be the highest ideal for them. To attain such a civilization, profound and radical reforms in education are essential. The civilization should be based on a new educative ideal, itself based on the principle of creativity, and not on conformistic socialization. A new humanistic civilization should be preceded by new and creative children and a young civilization based to a great extent on self-education and self-improvement.³⁵

The upbringing to leadership (religious, political, intellectual, aesthetic, economic, etc.) and to the regard for leadership as well as to the training for constructive cooperation were seen by Znaniecki as essential foundations of social integration. These educational processes were analyzed in his *Socjologia wychowania* (Sociology of Education)³⁶ and *Ludzie terażniejsi a cywilizacja przyszłości*. The role of leadership in the process of construction of various types of cultural and social order was examined by Znaniecki in his eminent work: *The Social Role of the Man of Knowledge*.³⁷

Ideological models ruling future experiences and actions of people should function as dynamic ideals. They would become the leading principles of actions tending toward a successful introduction of a new order in some parts of the culture. They cannot become dogmas, as is the case at present. These ideals undergo change because those who try to actualize them constantly confront new obstacles; dogmas are unalterable because they bring in preconceived solutions for all problems their believers might confront (whether

³⁵ F. Znaniecki, *Ludzie terażniejsi . . .*, p. 374.

³⁶ F. Znaniecki, *Socjologia Wychowania* (Książnica-Atlas, vol. I, Warszawa 1928; vol. II, Warszawa 1930).

³⁷ F. Znaniecki, *The Social Role of the Man of Knowledge* (Columbia University Press, New York 1940).

religious, political, aesthetic, cognitive, etc.).³⁸ Authoritative guidance in the form of organized upbringing, including propaganda and organized repression, beginning with persuasion, constitutes the basic agent of stabilization of ideological models. The use of coercion is an indication of the turn from ideals to dogmas. Prevailing preservative reorganization consisting of active repression of transgression would be replaced by creative reorganization, which would consist of enlarging its positive functions, extending its attractiveness to the participants and establishing positive ties between them and participants of other systems. Conflict would thus be replaced by cooperation. Znaniecki's prospective ideas of the Future Civilizations are too deeply rooted in systematic analyses of contemporary and past societies to be naive visions. The remaining question is why and to what extent they are rather "utopian" than "revolutionary utopias," once they have been implemented, and why, once they approached "the real," they separated themselves from "the normal" and "the just."

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³⁸ F. Znaniecki, *Cultural Sciences. Their Origin and Development* (University of Illinois Press, Urbana 1952), pp. 281–290.