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LIBERTY, ENLIGHTENMENT, AND THE POLISH BRETHERN

Abstract

The article presents an overview of the history of the idea of dialogics and liberty of expression. This liberty is strictly tied to the problem of liberty of conscience. Since the 17th century, the development of the dialogics traveled from an apocalyptic – and demonising its opponents – discourse as in John Milton's approach in *Areopagitica*, through dialogics of cooperation and obligations and laws (in the Polish Brethren, so-called Socinians, especially Jan Crell), through dialogics of deduction (transcendental deduction in Immanuel Kant), to dialogics of induction and creativity (John Stuart Mill).

Key words: liberty of conscience, liberty of expression, Enlightenment, history of ideas, dialogue

AREOPAGITICA BY JOHN MILTON AND THE APOCALYPTIC AND MARKET DIALOGICS (1644)

The best starting point of my analysis is John Milton's *Areopagitica* from 1644, which not only concerns liberty and freedom of speech, but also is the most famous and most extensive prose work of Milton, who has become world famous, above all, due to his poetry (Tazbir, 1973, p. 111).

The text was published on November 23, 1644, without a license, without registration, without the identification of the publisher and printer, and was the first English text entirely devoted to freedom of speech and publishing. The fact that responsibility was taken for the "free word" of the author, who allowed himself to be identified on the title page is critical.

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In this treatise (although formally the pamphlet is defined as a speech, it was never presented to parliament, contrary to the information on the title page), the relationship of the philosophy of mind and social philosophy seems to be its most interesting aspect. Books, according to Milton, are a material record of reasoning and disputation. They not only record all opinions and arguments, but also cover the truth in the form of correct evidence and proven facts in the record that people can see. Thus: “he who kills a man, kills a rational creature, the image of God; but the one who destroys a good book, kills the mind itself, destroys the image of God, just as he appears in the living eye” (Milton, 1644). In the context of a discussion on dialogue, one cannot overestimate such a bold and modern approach to this issue. This perspective anticipates Ray Bradbury’s *Fahrenheit 451* in a very sharp metaphorical way, a novel in which people become individual books because they have learned them by heart. However, the matter is more serious, especially in the context of a more modern discourse about the birth of the public sphere. The presupposed vision of the “mind of books” according to Milton is a vision of public reason, which comprises reasoning and debating, and possessing a discursive mind. It is important that the truth according to Milton is dispersed and fragmented. Habermas himself recalls Milton’s *Areopagitica* in his post-doctoral thesis when he talks about the progress of postulating Mill’s concept of freedom of speech (Habermas, 2007, p. 267). The killing of a single mind (or the mutilation of the body – its material carrier) is not as sinister and fateful as the censorship of books because books are a space embodying public reason, having a divine sanction in this version. It is no anachronism to see Milton’s anticipation of the concept of the mind as a dialogue, as well as Habermas’ idea of communicative reason (see Pask, 2004, and Guss, 1991).

It is very characteristic that Milton is also radical in the conclusions of his treatise, where he writes: “Let Truth and False grapple with each other” (Milton, 1644). He puts free and open experience above all else. Protestant individualism and the autonomy of the individual in confrontation with tradition and doctrine are significant, while the living dialogue of the believer with the Scriptures may foster the truth. Indeed, even the pamphlet itself is the result of a dialogue: “Even Moses or Paul learned from the Egyptians, from pagans, if not for such a free exchange, the sacred truth of the scriptures would not be shaped” (Milton, 1644). Therefore, “the real truth” of the Scriptures is not equal to monologue stone inscriptions, but the vivid dialogue of the saints with God – and a horrendous one with

pagans! Milton drew the correct conclusions from Luther's determination in the dispute with tradition: although for both the Scripture is the most crucial point of reference, for Milton the Holy Bible itself is also the result of a dispute.

However, it is also worth noting that this dialogue of various truths is, in essence, a dialogue of truth and falsehood, from which drama is understood as an existential tension between values, not as a genre. If we take a closer look at *Areopagitica* and Milton's other writings, the metaphorical conceptualisation presupposed by his discourse is outlined inconsistently: on the one hand, it suggests the libertarian dialogue of the nascent market of ideas in the public space, with this conceptualisation forming a dialogical free marketplace of ideas. On the other hand, this very intense existential tension between the values of truth and falsehood suggests a kind of discourse derived from entirely different registers, from the apocalyptic millenarian genre. This tension comprises a register where the principle is obvious: from sharp opposition and a fierce battle between the two elements, good and evil, or, as in *Areopagitica*, the struggle between truth and falsehood. Here, one may see a peculiar dramatic debate that finds its counterpart in Milton's other writings, in the dialectics of Ramus's logic. The inconsistency of this conceptualisation stems from Milton's religious commitment and historical context: during the Cromwellian revolution in England, the apocalyptic discourse was quite natural (Hill, 1972). This discourse is probably also responsible for the very pointed exclusion of Catholics from the area of tolerance: an apocalyptic beast in the form of the papacy cannot be tolerated if it is behind not only a secular power with a universal reach, but also Satan as the embodiment of evil. Such a reconstruction of Milton's way of thinking is conjecture based on the context of his occurrence in the times in which he lived. The apocalyptic conceptualisation is not a worldview profile which is possible to reconcile with the prospect of market negotiations, where the grand discursive strategy is flexibility in negotiation: in the Polish language the words "to bargain", "to haggle" (pol. *targować się*) constitute a great metaphor, or rather metonymy. Bargaining cannot be reconciled with the discourse of apocalyptic destruction, the reasoning for haggling not being consistent with the ambivalent elevation of the sublimity of prophecy. Apocalyptic logic constitutes dialogics in the literal sense because it is the logic of two opposing values and worlds. In this sense, the apocalyptic dialogue resembles the dialectic of Ramus's concept of opposition, whose supporter

and translator, as well as propagator, was John Milton. It may be surprising that traces of such a dialogue of these two main values may also be found in Bakhtin's concept of carnival (Bachtin, 1975, Bolecki, 1999, Szahaj, 1996). The war between fasting and carnival is based on the logic of oppositions and is a kind of apocalyptic logic, which is best seen in the visual arts and literature, in which the aesthetic quality of the grotesque marks this motif. Similarly, the logic of carnival warring with fasting may be found in an author writing much earlier than Bakhtin, namely Lord Shaftesbury, whose view was that prophetic enthusiasm opposes the test of ridicule and satire (Płuciennik, 2006). This topic is best summarised in the metaphor of "Bartholomew's Fair" that is the conceptualisation of the market and democratic satire for the prophetic-apocalyptic rapture, especially when mentioning the possible relationship of this Shaftesbury metaphor with Jonson's drama, satirising the righteous and just ecstasy of the Puritans. "Bartholomew's Fair" is the embodiment of theatre and literature, elements that are already democratic, but still rooted in the premodern world of apocalyptic struggles.

In Milton's treatise, therefore, it would be necessary to perceive an intermediate stage between folk-apocalyptic and carnival culture and an entirely free marketplace of ideas ("market") and civic culture. We have here a metaphorical image of the "Chapel" struggling with the "Church" (as in the Church of England, but it is just metaphorical). Such metonymies may be used in English culture: dissenters, meaning the smaller "chapel"; and the Anglican church meaning "the church" *sensu stricto*. The metaphor uses the categories of thinking characteristic of carnival culture, the fair-ground area, embedded strongly into other areas of culture, such as a feudal church or mansion. Sharp opposition occurs as a result of the fact that the category of identity becomes discordant and dissident. A subject who achieves their identity through the negation of inertia, namely inertia of the semantic structure, places himself or herself in the opposite and in differentiation of the the proper force. The margin becomes the centre, and dislocation is subject to what is being repulsed and unwanted. Interestingly, we connect this state of English culture with a short period in Poland after the Warsaw Confederation, when the words "dissident", "dissenter" did not refer to the followers of non-Catholic churches, but only determined all faithful Christians. It was only due to the influence of the facts of violating the Confederation agreement that the Polish "chapel" was sharply opposed to the "church". The issue of discussions concerning freedom

of conscience in Poland is self-imposed as Milton was indirectly involved in this discussion. As Janusz Tazbir writes:

The atmosphere of religious disputes, accompanying the English Revolution, meant that the views of the Polish Brethren on the subject of freedom of conscience and the role of reason in assessing the truths of faith arouse special interest in their timeliness and intellectual innovation. The works of Samuel Przykowski and other Arian writers were well known to the creators of the concept of freedom of conscience in England. One man who was interested in the Socinian views there, was, among others, John Milton, author of the poem *Paradise Lost*; he was also involved in the printing of the Racovian Catechism, which appeared secretly in England in 1652. The treatise of John Crell *On the Freedom of Conscience* (the original English title of the 1646 translation is *A learned and exceeding well-complied Vindication of Liberty of Religion*) was twice translated into French; it also appeared in the Dutch language, it also had a few Latin editions. All these editions were printed in Amsterdam (Tazbir 1973, p. 111).²

Confusion regarding the case of Milton in his relationship with the Polish Brethren consisted of the fact that while he had power to be genuinely censorial, he allowed the publication of such anti-Trinitarian, unorthodox writings. However, the issue of the liberty of conscience was vital to him, as is also demonstrated by the dissenter character of the Westminster Confession, with which Milton may also be identified. One of the crucial points of this confession is Chapter 20 on Christian liberty and freedom of conscience (Pasek, 1999, p. 115). This point, moreover, has become a contentious issue concerning so-called independents, or the separation of Congregationalist churches which issued the so-called Savoy Declaration in 1658 (*A Declaration of the Faith and Order . . . 1658*). Subsequently, the cause of freedom of conscience became the source of conflict, leading pilgrims from England to become founders of the New World in America. This is why this treatise on the freedom of conscience by one of the Polish Brethren is of such crucial importance in this context.

² All translations come from the author of the article unless indicated otherwise.

FOR LIBERTY OF CONSCIENCE (*A LEARNED AND EXCEEDING
WELL-COMPLIED VINDICATION OF LIBERTY OF RELIGION*)
BY JOHN CRELL (1637) – MARKETPLACE DIALOGUE
AND 17TH CENTURY ENLIGHTENMENT

Unlike in England, where Milton still used the language of anti-Catholic confrontation, the situation appeared different in the case of the Socinians in Poland, that is the so-called Polish Brethren (Ogonowski, 1991, Szczucki & Tazbir, 1959, Tazbir, 1973). In their treatises, they focused on the issues of tolerance and liberty of conscience. Here, various non-confrontational regulators of public discourse are cited. They do not postulate absolute freedom of speech (one can hardly know for sure what this should be), but propose, on the one hand, regulations entirely different from such cruel solutions as persecution and censorship, and, on the other hand, from apocalyptic and satirical negation. Their conceptualisation appears entirely as subject to marketplace discourse, as “bargaining” and negotiating. The concept is most apparent in the treatise *For the Liberty of Conscience [A learned and exceeding well-complied Vindication of Liberty of Religion]* by Jan Crell, who was famous all over Europe and whose work was published four times in the 17th century (in 1637, 1650, 1666, and in 1681) (Crell, 1957). He probably had a major influence on the creation of John Locke’s *Enlightenment Letters [A Letter Concerning Toleration]*. In Crell’s treatise, one may find anticipations of Kantian and Enlightenment solutions. Crell invokes excerpts of Holy Scripture, pointing to the principle of reciprocity: “Do that to no man which thou hatest” (this probably comes from the canonical Book of Tobit (4:15) unaccepted by Protestants), or “do to others what you would have them do to you” (Matthew 7:12). These arguments are to justify the principle of Catholic and Protestant co-operation: if Catholics have sworn not to obey to the principle, they cannot simply revoke this oath as they have promised to honour it. Here, we can see the conceptualisation of the full marketplace dialogue: we have in this passage of the treatise a dialogue designed for honesty and fidelity, an amicable commitment and promise, a dialogue of trust, discourses based on the communicative principle of cooperation and reciprocity. It should be noted that the concept of Paul Grice’s principle of co-operation three centuries later is derived from the fully conceived concept of John Austin’s discourse (criticism accused the bourgeois prejudices against literature and theatre).

This oath dialogue is, at the same time, a dialogue of ritual bonds. Specific rites create commitments and networks and systems based on trust. The haggling discourse, which is not blind faith, and chooses equal negotiation of at least two sides, not only is an anti-apocalyptic discourse but also has the power to create social bonds, not to say society as a whole. This discourse means the equality of its subjects. Equality, however, is also a diminution of self-confidence. Zbigniew Ogonowski, in his introduction to Crell's treatise, writes that the Socinians found a natural scepticism associated to historicism. Thus, Samuel Przypkowski simply stated that although we are convinced of the truth of our truth, who will say for sure that we are not going astray. Socinus himself claimed that no one has the key to the truth (Ogonowski, 1991). Milton, with his concept of scattered and fragmented truth, would fit into this context. In the plan of the Polish Brethren, there is already an outline of a secular state, while for Milton, there is still a marriage of state and religion: "A spiritual and perfect religion, this reaches for what a person thinks and feels – without violence" (Crell, 1957, p. 42).

My interpretation of these writings by Crell indicates that Enlightenment concepts of public reason were born in the 17th century, not only in the 18th century, when a famous discussion about what enlightenment was took place in Germany during its closing years. (I refer to this in the first chapter of my book – Płuciennik, 2009, pp. 23–50).

Against this background, the major idea John Locke expressed in *A Letter Concerning Toleration* is much less radical (Locke, 1963). He disagreed unambiguously with the radicalism of the so-called Socinians and anti-Trinitarians, even though he was in possession of their writings. However, his view of the Christian religion was apparently "nice" to the "chapel", that is, he sympathised with the apostate:

He, certainly, that follows Christ, embraces His doctrine, and bears His yoke, though he forsake both father and mother, separate from the public assemblies and ceremonies of his country, or whomsoever or whatsoever else he relinquishes, will not then be judged a heretic (Locke, 1963, p. 4).

As if that were not enough, his plan concerning the separation of church and state (*ibid.*, p. 7) was outlined with the requirement that "each of the mortals" should be free to conduct debates and discuss matters of importance to him (*ibid.*, p. 9). It is also important to freely associate with "churches" and "chapels" (*ibid.*, p. 11). The state should not use its resolute

power beyond those cases that Locke says are outside the limits of tolerance: “no opinions contrary to human society, or to those moral rules which are necessary to the preservation of civil society, are to be tolerated by the magistrate” (ibid., p. 53). For Locke, tolerance should also not apply to Catholics (because they have a foreign ruler in Rome and want to kill the English king) and atheists. The latter have no power over themselves and are therefore dangerous. While it must be said that Locke’s vision has its limitations, it remains, apart from Crell’s treatise, the foundation of the concept of civil society and the development of the public sphere. Although religions outside of Christianity are not taken into account at all, this is due to the historical context of the time, as they did not constitute a real civic force and were, therefore, not a problem. Freedom of conscience is found in the treatises of Crell and Locke and they are very important advocates. Moreover, in the short history of dialogics, they constitute milestones towards a full marketplace dialogue based on trust and (self-)scepticism at the same time. Both treatises show the emerging ethics of a financial, economic and logical account. However, this quality is even more visible at the end of the Enlightenment. In this respect, the Polish impact is much more valuable than it has been usual to admit in Poland.

WHAT IS ENLIGHTENMENT? BY IMMANUEL KANT AND THE POLISH BRETHREN. A DIALOGUE OF TRANSCENDENTAL DEDUCTION

I will now look at the brilliant concept of the dialogue of rational intellect formulated by Andrzej Wiszowaty (*On religion in accordance with reason*, 1676), (Wiszowaty, 1960) who was centuries ahead of the solutions proposed and refined by Kant (*Critique of Judgment*, 1790). Leibniz’s logic could, however, probably be considered an intermediary (Huber, 2005, Ogonowski, 1991). In Wiszowaty’s book, we find the reason for conducting a free debate (this directly affects intelligibility; the gibberish and incomprehensibility of inspired prophecy are excluded, which is confirmed to some extent in the Scriptures). In the concept of Kant, one may see that it is practical reason (lat. *sensus communis aestheticus*) that excludes Cartesian egotism (Cascardi, 1999, p. 48, also Cascardi, 1992).

On the one hand, one may find in Kant’s work a suggestion of unlimited freedom, including debate, at least within academic circles, which

seems to be quite conservative minimalism today. An academy is not a voluntary café association. Thus, in the article *What is Enlightenment?* (1784) (Kroński, 1966) it may be said that trust in mutual relations within the framework of democratic bargaining and negotiation discourses must also postulate self-confidence, and this will be impossible to achieve without the autonomy of the individual. The market enforces equality which emancipates the subjects participating in the negotiations.

A somewhat less frequently quoted text of Kant defining enlightenment is Chapter 40 concerning the part called “Analysis of Sublimity” in his *Critique of Judgment*. This is an excerpt where enlightenment is invoked as making one free from superstition (Kant, 2004, pp. 211–212). It only fits to summarise Kant’s brief deliberations: he praises individualism and Cartesian autonomy and his break with society, family and tradition in spirit. However, instead of a Cartesian *deus ex machina*, Kant proposes a *sensus communis* as a signpost. The maxim of taste requires the extension of its subjectivity through a “broader way of thinking”, which allows the individual to “rise above the individual subjective conditions of the judgment”. At the same time, Kant is categorical regarding uniqueness and universality. It may be said that Kant’s categorical approach eliminates his recognition for subjectivity as he appreciates and negates it at the same time: “feeling in the judgment of taste comes to be imputed to everyone, so to speak, as a duty” (Kant, 2004, p. 214). Kant’s dialogue is a dialogue of reason with transcendental pretensions. In Wiszowaty’s treatise, we have the classic dialogic of Aristotle’s deduction, and in Kant the dialogue of transcendental deduction, which is a dialogue of autonomy and intersubjective ecstasy, going beyond oneself and identifying with others. However, there are other concepts as a model. In this lies the totalitarian dimension of Kant’s ideas, although it is the output towards them, the deflection and openness of the presupposition for dialogue rather than the monologue model of the mind. The way of thinking in this model is dictated by deduction; there are abstract rules regulating dialogue. It is interesting that Wiszowaty excludes inspired prophecy based on deductive reason, while Kant leaves the gate open for inspired prophecy in the form of a transcendental subject. The above-mentioned ecstatic “expanding” oneself to different perspectives is close to the illogicality and babbling of inspired prophets: it is a metaphorical speaking in tongues; it is a transgression beyond one’s language; a confusion of languages; and introspective polyphony. At this point, one may already see the potential of subjective idealism for objectivisation.

It is very similar to the subject of transcendental deduction which produces an objective spirit. Although Kant's criticism does not allow this transition, when autoscepticism fails, criticism will cease to be the primary signpost, and romanticism will be unleashed.

ON LIBERTY (1859), JOHN STUART MILL – EVOLUTIONARY INDUCTIVE DIALOGUE

An entirely different model of thinking is found in the next excellent text which established, at the same time, another milestone on the "way of freedom" – in a treatise entitled *On Liberty* by John Stuart Mill (1859) after the Declaration of the Rights of the Man and of the Citizen had been issued (Mill, 2005). Interestingly, Susan Mendus has juxtaposed Locke and Mill, awarding the latter strong praise for diversity (Locke argued only for tolerating debates and addressed his letter to rulers) (Mendus, 1989, p. 38), whereas, for Habermas, the combination of Milton and Mill is important (Habermas, 2007, p. 267). If Kant's view was somehow summarised by the 18th century, Mill perfectly synthesises the trends of the 19th century. In Mill, we find another model for the dialogue of deduction, which is the dialogue of the authentic diversity of subjects, as well as being a dialogue of creativity: "There is no freedom without diversity" and "there is no creativity without diversity". Social discourse is enlightened, and therefore self-aware and leaning towards another, namely the dialogue of diversity, although the minority should be protected from the tyranny of the majority. Moreover, in Habermas' text this is what he comments: if Milton pleads for the public sphere in the face of power, the same educated public sphere is the addressee of Mill's treatise. The space created at the intersection of the "chapel" and "church" tends to change into a dictatorship of the majority. This area must constantly be expanded; one cannot stop progress in this regard. Regulation, in the form of endless creativity or inventiveness, makes it impossible to silence the truths seemingly wrong today as it is unknown what the situation will be in a few or several dozen years away. Moreover, if one does not know and if one acknowledges an evolutionary way of reaching the truth, society may suffer irreparable damage, excluding any other points of view. Mill already acknowledged the evolution and usefulness of scientific inventions. Hence, this goes beyond the dialogue of enlightenment; there is already a dialogue of induction leading to

invention and creation. Mill's social discourse is a dialogue of evolutionary induction. The most important of Mill's developments, however, is that the main and only regulator of discourse is the so-called harm principle. Freedom possesses a degree of this in the form of the principle of "harming another": you can say anything that does not harm others more or less directly. Therefore, it cannot be argued that Mill opts for total freedom and freedom of speech. Dialogics is limited and regulated, both by the principle of creativity and by harm to others. However, it is also vital that Mill recalls this harm to others as the most critical regulator, as this constitutes an openness to the possibility of establishing a discourse of emancipation and, in consequence, one which is critical. I do not think Habermas is right when he writes:

Mill demanded not criticism but tolerance, because the dogmatic residues could indeed be suppressed but not reduced to the common denominator of reason. The unity of reason and of public opinion lacked the objective guarantee of a concordance of interests existing in society, the rational demonstrability of a universal interest as such (Habermas, 2007, p. 268).

Although one may agree with the second part of this quote, to state that Mill did not demand criticism is unfair as Mill was also a co-author of *The Subjection of Women* and the President of the Society for Women's Suffrage.

In conclusion, it may be argued that the Polish Brethren's legacy must be taken into account when talking about liberal views on freedom. Although their probable influence on the concepts of enlightenment is much wider than usually imagined, even if this cannot be confirmed by very much evidence, the quality of their reflections are such that it should not be excluded from the record of thinking concerning liberty and enlightenment. Thus, they constitute a crucial part of the European liberal tradition in Christianity (Płuciennik, 2009, Chapter 1).

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