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CYNICISM: A LITHUANIAN VERSION

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Ordinary Cynicism and Philosophical Cynicism

When talking about cynicism it is worthwhile to consider first the everyday usage of this word, since theoretical and critical debates melt into everyday mentality, affecting it and in turn being affected by it. Live thinking leaves its traces in the dictionaries. The writers of dictionaries of the second republic of Lithuania have not offered independent definitions of the word. In V. Vaitkevičienė's *Dictionary of International Words (Tarptautinių žodžių žodynas)* cynicism is defined in the same way as in *The Dictionary of Contemporary Lithuanian Language (Dabartinės lietuvių kalbos žodynas)*, which in turn repeats the older Soviet one: "defiant disregard of morals and shamelessness" (Vaitkevičienė 2001; Keinys 1993). The definition is clearly too narrow: it covers only the action, not the mentality. The dictionary published by Alma littera is more conceptual: it defines cynicism as "a moral principle based on the denial of an individual's dependence on society; it is manifested as nihilist attitude towards spiritual culture, as open defiance of the norms of morality, as sneering at its principles and ideals and as humiliation of human dignity" (Kindurys 2001). The definition adds the clause found in Soviet dictionaries: cynicism is "*a contemptuous attitude towards the rules of decency; shamelessness and vulgar openness*" (Kvietkauskas 1985; Kruopas 1969).

However, our everyday usage of words is insufficient for a theoretical debate. It is even possible that cynicism is not what it seems to be in terms of its ordinary understanding. To grasp the character of our cynical thinking we should go back to the point in Western history when this concept first emerged, that is, to its origins in Greek philosophy, to the Cynicists, and then we can use it as a point of reference in trying to understand the manifestations of cynicism as deformations, transformations and variations of original Cynicism. This does not mean that we derive contemporary cynicism from the classical one; the perspective is only used for the sake of analysis.

In the history of philosophy the place of Cynicism is far from prominent: it emerges as one of post-Socratic schools of practical philosophy, but it seemingly remains a marginal one. Later on Cynicism as a school of thought disappears completely from the philosophical scene. Hegel in his *Lectures on the History of Philosophy* starts the chapter on the Cynics by observing, "There is nothing of particular to say about the Cynics" (Hegel 1971: 685). I do not know whether Heidegger ever mentioned the Cynics, but he definitely did not consider their thinking in a comprehensive way; apparently, for him they did not belong to the history of Western metaphysics. And yet they were radical thinkers and we should re-center the history of thinking so that it would be possible to juxtapose the Cynics with what is usually considered as fundamental topics of philosophy. The task is of course beyond the scope of this essay, but it takes note of such a perspective.

There are no surviving texts by the most important Cynic, Diogenes of Sinope. We know about him only by what the oral tradition has passed on, mainly through Diogenes Laërtius' and some other authors' written records. Jokes communicate the words of the famous Cynic and tell about his actions, for in this case the close connection between words and deeds is of particular importance. In these stories it is quite difficult to distinguish the Cynical thinking from Stoicism, Epicureanism and Sophistics, as they are mixed with what mundane consciousness considers the strange manners of philosophers in general. The ancient Greek schools of practical philosophy had much in common in terms of objectives: laying the foundations for rational conduct, autonomy and absence of want. Perhaps only historians of philosophy treating the matter from a certain theoretical point of view can separate the school of Cynics from other trends of ancient Greek practical philosophy. I have done much the same by having selected from hundreds of testimonies a mere dozen, which hopefully reveal the basics of cynical thinking.

The name itself, *kynikos*, "canine," shows that philosophers belonging to this trend make an effort to treat human reality from a radically animalist (canine) point of view and to act accordingly. Dion Chrysostom tells about Diogenes that "he laughed at those who suffered from thirst but passed by

the spring of water and looked where they could buy wine from Chios or Lesbo. They, Diogenes said, were much more stupid than grazing cattle who would never pass by a source or a clear stream when thirsty" (Нахов 1984: 165). Cynicism can be characterized as a naturalist critique of culture. The Cynics are intent on reducing and desublimating all that is conceived as the sublime and that constitutes the specifically humane – cultural and social – existential dimension. "Another of his sayings was, that things of great value were often sold for nothing, and vice versa. Accordingly, that a statue would fetch three thousand drachmas, and a bushel of meal only two obols" (Diogenes Laertios 1968: 328).[1] Any moral, value-based, cultural or political discourse, any institution, any dimension of the higher is radically questioned; an individual is faced with bare nature. The Cynics deny the society and its strictures, the state and its institutions; they reject social status, money, political power, family – all those social conventions, which we readily call 'taboos' (although today they have little in common with the real archaic taboos). The law of nature, not of society, is what is important for Diogenes. He "said that marriage was a nullity, and that the proper way would be for every man to live with her whom he could persuade to agree with him. […]" (1968: 348-349). In this case the stress is on individual consent, but sometimes the reasoning is much more radical: a life according nature defies even the ban on incest and cannibalism.

However, Cynicism is not so much a theory of human nature reducing it to animalism as a particular practice based on a direct pursuit of natural living. Diogenes respected only the need for food, shelter and sex. "Being once reproached for eating in the market-place, he made answer, "I did, for it was in the market-place that I was hungry" (1968: 341). For the Greeks the market place or Agora was a public space *par excellence*, and eating was mostly a private affair; Diogenes was brazenly seeking to make the private public, to wipe away the boundary between the private and the public space. He lived "like a dog" in an old tub, did not respect any social norms and prohibitions, was behaving shamelessly, used to eat, urinate and make love publicly. The Cynic homogenized and desemanticized the social space by using any place for any purpose. This is a radical negation of heterotopy essential to culture and it reduces it to natural homotopy.

The Cynics differed from other practical philosophers by their radical, drastically straightforward actions and words that shocked observers and listeners. They used to practice provocative speeches and actions, which had to guarantee them independence from any rules observed by everybody else. They did all this in order to overcome shame and thus dependency on the community. Shame is experienced in the face of the other; it is primarily

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1   Translation of Diogenes Laertius is from: http://classicpersuasion.org/pw/diogenes/dldiogenes.htm

a social feeling. Shamefulness, feeling ashamed and shaming are power-ful mechanisms determining the community's life. The Cynics' attempt to overcome shame was an attempt to overcome their dependency on others by publicizing the private in such a way as to neutralize the public itself. However, while behaving drastically a Cynic still remains essentially dependent on the human context: he is not a dog; he is *like* a dog. Moreover, the over-coming of his dependency is not only psychological, not only egocentric: such conduct effectively eliminates an individual from the community, for the community itself eliminates somebody behaving this way, dissociates from him and rejects him. This is the meaning of the Cynic's provocation and the scandal he creates. "Once at a banquet, some of the guests threw him bones, as if he had been a dog; so he, as he went away, put up his leg against them as if he had been a dog in reality" (1968: 334). The Cynic's action takes place in the interpersonal, social environment and projects the characteristics of that environment, takes them into consideration and at-tempts to change them.

One more example: "And as he was continually doing manual work in public, he said one day, "Would that by rubbing my belly I could get rid of hunger!" (1968: 334). Thus, even the animal nature, which the Cynic is ap-pealing to, is not yet the most radical basis revealed or at least approached by his thinking: the unachievable goal – the appeasement of hunger without food – is not in the realm of live nature, of *bios*, but in that of the elements, in the Freudians' realm of Thanatos; it is not the independence of an animal but rather the tranquility of a mineral.

The Cynic's action is not technically complicated; its repetition re-quires no special preparation or knowledge but mere resolve. There is no figurative meaning, no metaphor here: the action is drastically direct; it says something precisely through the fact that something is being done. Such a practice remains effective and repeatable on the same plane as a direct ac-tion and not a sign or a reference to something else. A contemporary Rus-sian artist Oleg Kulik used to be chained up naked during art vernissages and barked like a dog, and if somebody approached, he would attack. He bit badly the leg of an art critic's who ignored the warning to beware of the angry dog. On the Internet I found pictures of Kulik having sex with a dog. Probably they are not imitations, for otherwise the very principle of Cynical devilry and directness would be infringed: the Cynic shocks not by "imitating action" (this is how Aristotle defined theatre, a fictional spectacle designed for the observer), but by performing it. Half a century ago Witold Gombrowicz wrote that in their writings Parisian existentialists emphasized the individual's freedom of choice, but when you started taking off your pants in a restaurant they would almost jump out of the window willing

to disassociate from you. It is a significant detail that Eastern Europeans try to perform a Cynical action this way. Of course, others can also understand the meaning of such an action (there is nothing to misunderstand here) but they do not dare to become the Cynic's disciples. The repetition of this uncomplicated thing (Hegel was especially irritated by the simplicity and vulgarity of Cynical practices) is not and never was easy. "Once a man came to him, and wished to study philosophy as his pupil; and he gave him a saperda and made him follow him. And as he from shame threw it away and departed, he soon afterwards met him and, laughing, said to him, "A saperda has dissolved your friendship for me."" (1968: 329).

Therefore, there are two most important characteristics of Cynicism:

1. A reductionist understanding of human nature; desublimation of the dimension of the sublime. The naturalizing gaze bores through any phenomena of cultural existence and entire strata of them, unmasks them as epiphenomena, as conventions and illusions, hiding another stratum of existence from the people entangled in them – nature or even cosmic elements. The examples of the reduction of culture to nature are food instead of art, nourishment instead of taking pleasure in food, masturbation instead of eroticism. The procedures of reduction (desublimation) are on different levels, they function locally: this reduces to that. A particular reductionist solution is cheerfully brutal, but a whole chain of such syllogisms ends darkly: in self-mineralization.

2. A drastic and shocking word or action not only lays bare the nature of things by exposing what is usually hidden. It also changes the existence of the acting person turning it into a quasi-natural one and thus conferring to the performer (but only to him!) a peculiar status in the human community: his presence inside it and at the same time somehow outside it. The action removes the performer from his usual life and traditional community and transfers him into the space of a peculiar Cynical existence. The Cynic not only exposes and unmasks things; he also destroys a stratum of human existence – the dimension of the sublime – in a particular area.

The Origins of Our Cynicism. Credulity

When we look at the history of thinking we encounter a paradox. Cynicism created a certain philosophical practice that survived for several centuries in Greece and Rome, but then it disappeared as a definite philosophical school or trend. However, cynicism can be found nearly everywhere and always as a spontaneous (anti)cultural practice as well as a component of daily thinking. It is easy to discover various manifestations and varieties of this way of thinking and acting, but it is often difficult to grasp their es-

sence. I am not going to discuss the variety of its manifestations here; I will only point out some constellations of cynical positions that are important for the definition of our cynicism.

Most often cynicism is partial, fragmentary and eclectic; it combines a radical and destructive insight with some components of positive and dogmatic character. It is practiced as a criticism unmasking specific social and cultural phenomena, debasing them, but confining itself to them, not expanding its field of attention and not progressing in the course of its thinking. Sometimes cynicism is used in homeopathic dosages. Most often cynicism is not principled and philosophical; it is merely an instrumental, non-reflective, spontaneous and mundane way of thinking, an anonymous *doxa*. It affects one's conduct not by following a clearly understood principle, but rather by following an interest, an inclination or simply a whim. Cynicism can also stay away from the public sphere and thrive in privacy as a hidden, undeclared, but nevertheless real basis of thinking on par with a peasant's ruse. This contrasts with the philosophical Cynicism most clearly, which was essentially public and used to transform the public sphere.

One might think that for cynicism it is essential to be honest at least with oneself, to have a clear understanding of one's own motivation. Sometimes this is indeed the case but not necessarily: reduced and desublimated are usually the motives of other people, not one's own; cynical clarity makes exception for one's own case; cynical explanations are directed towards the actions of others, sometimes of all others. Motivation by the sublime is reserved the explanation of one's own actions, while the pursuits of others are not recognized as respectable. One speaks of them purely technologically and naturalistically in an unmasking way. The intersubjectivity of such two semi-cynicists is quite unique: they reduce each other's motivations, not necessarily symmetrically, to the same plane. The reciprocal unmasking leaves little common ground by restricting the possibilities of communication between individuals and leading to their atomization: it is difficult to coordinate your efforts with somebody you consider a bastard, and if it is sometimes possible, then only in a restricted area. Compared to the Cynic's action, we have an inversion here along the most important axis of personal responsibility: cynical thinking is no longer based on a radical practice antagonizing an individual with the community and thus freeing him from dependence on it, instead it turns into an individual's means of explaining other people's behavior involving no costs or adverse consequences for himself.

Moving towards our present cynicism we should consider its origins and the conscious or unconscious memory. Its archaeological stratification is quite simple: in our present thinking its most effective stratum was already formed in Soviet Lithuania. The most conspicuous and perhaps the most decisive factor

of this manner of thinking was the dominance of the openly inauthentic and bluffing ideology relying on force and rough manipulation. During the Soviet period, especially towards the end of it, this ideology had few sincere exponents, was hardly taken seriously by most, though quite a thick layer of society was feeding on it. At the same time it was the stuff that used to fill the entire public space, leaving room for no alternatives.[2] For most people it was clear even without any analytical effort that the official ideology was a manipulative bluff covering the rule of brute power. However, precisely this – the experience of the clearly fictitious but at the same time almost omnipotent reality – was massively producing cynical consciousness. This was a "death of ideology" for millions: not a result of critical theoretical thinking, but a constituent of everyday anonymous *praxis* and *doxa*. Having lived in the circumstances of bluff ideology for decades, having had no possibilities to articulate and discuss the alternatives, people were disciplined (not merely taught) to disbelieve totally what was said publicly. There was no need to make any effort in order to become cynically insightful: the duality of the real, the façade quality of the public discourse was obvious to the masses in their everyday experience.

Precisely this experience of having no ideology is the most important source of our present cynicism. This public discourse has now been totally transformed, any monopoly on ideology has disappeared, and it has become very colorful indeed. However, the reservoir of cynicism deep inside remains huge and explanations of public life continue to refer to its resources. The reservoir is being constantly refilled by the actions of the government and other centers of power. The government regulates whatever it wishes to regulate; it pursues its own ideological projects, but does not discharge – again without any explanation – some of its essential functions. The Lithuanian language, something most personal to everyone, has been nationalized; its grammar has been connected to the Legal Code: one may be punished for a linguistic mistake. Sets of traditional beliefs, ethnic culture, and historical facts have become the object of public legal protection and regulation. Seeing so much brand-new and constantly renewed legislation of dubitable quality it is difficult not to be a cynic. On the other hand, the society encourages the government to act this way; it does not question and does not discuss the limits of its competence, on the contrary, it requires overstepping these limits every time this seems desirable. When there was an outbreak of HIV infection in a correctional colony, there were demands to keep the HIV positive behind the bars indefinitely, that is, to condemn them to the harshest penalty envisioned by the Penal Code, life imprisonment, even though getting infected is not considered as crime by the law.

[2] See: T. Sodeika, A. Sverdiolas, "Life in the Retort and Soon Thereafter", *Lituanus* (Chicago), 1991, vol. 37, No.2.

The society's belief/disbelief in the 'reality' of institutions is of the same order: it manifests *inter alia* through boundless voluntaristic creativity. An institution appears as something that wholly depends on our own discretion. Though there is no king in Lithuania the Royal Union of Lithuanian Nobility was founded; it could have been equally entitled as Imperial or Galactic. It has made its own definition of a nobleman. Obviously, such self-nobilization is still benign, even if exotic. However, the Dadaist construction of societies/institutions coalesces with political activities of the same kind: the prime minister of the republic has given a palace as a gift to the Royal Union in a gesture of an absolute monarch. Universities are being founded following the same principle. No value system, even so delicate, but sometimes inexorable, as taste ever restricts or directs such actions. No wonder, the cynical thought accompanies all these burlesques and grotesques: "who cares about such nobility," "who cares about such universities". These and other pseudo-heterotopies beg to be homogenized, the bogus sublime begs ridicule.

Property is among the main areas of legitimacy. However, the notorious phrase of Pierre Joseph Proudhon *propriété c'est le vol* is not a radical socialist anarchist slogan for us but a statement of fact we observe daily: who are the big-time proprietors if not the most successful thieves? Directors of factories turned into their proprietors in front of our eyes; we do not need to know the *peripeteia* of this miraculous transformation of 'people's' property into private property to be able to look at the result cynically. Under such conditions the principle of the immunity of property appears to be a thing of the same order as communism used to be: pure future, a pure project. Some would say that the origin of property is always a primordial seizure; supposedly, the next generation will be different. However, this is a cynical philosophy of history. In his classical masterpiece Max Weber derived the spirit of capitalism from protestant ethics, but it is hard to believe that a symmetrical reverse origin is possible, that some kind of ethics could be reborn from the spiritless body of our capitalism.

Yet let us return to the archaeology of our consciousness. Marxist ideology was militant anti-ideology: it unmasked all other ideologies as products of false consciousness, as tools of class domination. Class interest and its derivatives were considered a kind of nature, a reality behind any cognitive or value oriented discourse. It was cynical: all other ideas and motives were simulacra hiding the real causes, 'nothing but' expressions of a hidden interest. The so-called historical materialism, or a dialectical version of cynicism, was taught as part of the curriculum of humanities and social sciences and in all textbooks; it permeated public discourse on public issues no matter whether sincerely held or just used as disguise for saying something else by way of hints.

A destructive criticism of the basis of a community's existence is howe-ver simultaneously its radical recreation, or creation of a community based on cynicism. The official clichés used to condemn democracy and the rule of law as formal trimmings hiding the real domination of power, so natu-rally "formal" came to mean "unreal". This is embodied in the Lithuanian language: our word "formalus" does not have the meaning of the English word "formal" as correct, conforming to the rules and real precisely because of this. For us, "formal" means exactly not the real thing. Today no longer 'materialist', but 'idealist' principles are proposed as if they were self-evident, without making any serious attempt to reflect on the recent past, to make clear what has really happened with our consciousness during the profound changes in our society and culture.

It may seem strange and yet the pervasive cynicism can be perfectly combined with credulity. If one believes that values have no value, that they are only superficial, feigned appearances reducible to interests and powers so that in the end 'nothing has any meaning', it is very easy to start believing in any motive of an actions provided it seems cynical enough. When a real or even only apparent interest is discovered there is a feeling as if one has grasped the real meaning of words and actions of a person or a group.

Our press calls itself the fourth power and ignoring the figurative cha-racter of the appellation acts as an independent source of power. As a matter of fact, the huge influence of this self-appointed power comes from mani-pulation. Most often it is precisely the unmasking devices that are used for manipulation. The effect is almost guaranteed: when we hear that power x stands behind phenomenon a, while power y stands behind phenomenon b we believe this spontaneously, for precisely this relationship between the phe-nomenon and the epiphenomenon in social reality seems to us 'obvious'. The TV program "Do Financial Groups Control Lithuania?" does not give any information; it analyses or reveals nothing in detail; only insinuations are being thrown about. Then the audience is invited to vote by mobile phones and a nearly unanimous opinion is announced: "Yes. They do." The groups seem to be are hiding at the foundations of nearly all social life, and yet there have been no attempts to discuss publicly the anatomy or physiology of any such group. In the same manner the multifaceted corruption is being ascri-bed to anyone without any argumentation, without providing any evidence. The unmasking phraseology is sufficient for the naively cynical viewers and readers. Civil servants are almost unanimously considered as parasites and bribe takers, politicians, as fools and prostitutes; the words "mafia", "money laundering", "politicalization" and the like are being used indiscriminately. Spontaneously cynical presuppositions about the character of the society are being made without any factual analysis and even in the absence of facts.

In Soviet Lithuania the common perception was that KGB was hiding in the shade of any activity. Real experience used to transform into paranoia without any noticeable gap: references to the omnipotent secret service were enough to explain even the actions of active opponents of the regime. The secret service was considered to be the ultimate active agent hidden behind the surface of ideology, power and the whole life of the society. It is indeed very difficult to identify a social actor under the conditions of a totalitarian society. However, the attitude and the difficulty remain despite the fact that the society has been transformed in many ways. The KGB is our greatest trauma: we refer to this construction in trying to find out who creates our social reality, what are the real centers of power. Emptiness remained in the place of the masked power that used to dominate really, and this emptiness has been occupied by phantom bogus powers, which remain mostly unnamed or dubbed as "certain powers" even in the official discourse of governments. Essentially mysterious powers and characters are pushing the figures on the chessboard, while themselves thriving somewhere beyond it, shapeless and nameless.

Collisions of Cynicism and What's Next

One should distinguish two regimes of cynicism. Classical cynicism emerged against the background of a live tradition, a 'spontaneous', 'natural' system of ideals, principles and norms; it existed next to them and on their account as a reductionist criticism of them. Our cynicism is different: it thrives in the context of our direct experience of vertiginous nothing, a gap running across the façade and the foundation of our society. However, in these circumstances radical thinking has been strangely paralyzed and experienced a failure at what might seems to be the moment of its triumph: it cannot unfold effectively because there are no hard things, which one could attempt to shatter, penetrate analytically in the hope of discovering something non-banal in their depth. A piercing cynical gaze does not discover any depth; nothing that would be worth of attention, worth anything, for everything is shallow. Only this shallowness is inverted: the depth and the surface have seemingly swapped their positions. While seeing the physiology of an act, a text or an institution a cynic does not see their surface. When analyzing some phenomenon he pays attention to what is hidden behind it without taking note and understanding what it is. It should be worthwhile taking note of phenomena but hardly of epiphenomena: after all, the truth lies somewhere deeper inside and could be reached differently.

Cynicism falls into an idiosyncratic collision. A naïve cynic says: "interests rule it all". But if it is really *all* then the circle closes, thinking returns reflectively to itself and is paralyzed. A further movement of thought beco-

mes impossible; it needs a fracture in consciousness or its own defeat, anyway, something Hegelian or rather Kierkegaardian. If there is no such fracture, one has to repeat the same cynical idea whenever some object attracts one's attention. The cynical thinking is dynamic; and yet it does not move in any definite direction, but rotates around those fragments of the sublime, which it yet keeps discovering from time to, fortunately or unfortunately. A target appears, the cynic shoots, (always) hits and the episode ends; another target has to appear so that everything would repeat like a neurotic symptom.

Moreover, our cynicism is two-layered, a cynicism covering cynicism: the social cultural reality and the cynical attitude towards former reality based on cynical thinking and acting, absolutely dominant not long ago and still remaining much alive. However, to think about the cynical reality cynically is to think about it correctly, because it is precisely what one thinks of it. An alternative to cynicism in this situation would be only naiveté, shortsightedness, inability to see what there is, to understand what is really happening and why. Idealism, which follows principles that have nothing to do and do not want to have anything to do with the cynical reality, falls into this category. Such idealists resemble the prudish pupils from the novel by Witold Gombrowicz, *Ferdydurke*, to whom their cynical classmates were whispering obscenities and the prudish were trying to save their virginity by wriggling and squealing like pigs.

A constructive alternative to cynicism would be such an action that would change reality, would create a positive alternative in the social and cultural domain. Of course, a reality based on non-cynical, non-reductionist foundations would also confront a cynical judgment as anything does. However, such a judgment would not be correct and well grounded; it would seem shortsighted, naïve and unable to see what there really is. Such a reality would be resistant to cynicism.

Of course, a whole range of questions concerning the nature of social reality arises here, which should be considered at length elsewhere. However, here it is necessary to be reminded of at least one thing: the human reality is unique because attitudes towards it participate in it and partly determine it; this is why innocent cynicism does not exist. Strangely, Peter Sloterdijk remains on the level of representation in his analysis of Cynicism: Diogenes was "telling the truth," stripping reality bare; the essence of Cynicism was the revelation of (shameless) truth. Yet this is a very disputable assumption, since by his action a Cynic not only reveals but also changes, even produces, reality. It is obvious in Eastern Europe that an attitude debasing the dimension of the sublime and reducing values is very effective; in fact, it achieves what a radical Diogenian action was seeking: it unravels the fabric of communal life and makes it 'natural'.

A Cynic used to do precisely this individually, all by himself, through a radical practice that required huge and resolute efforts. Today's cynicism is not a radical and purely personal practice; on the contrary, it is a ready-made product for mass consumption. The cynical ways of thinking and cynical action are enacted massively, anonymously and without any effort. Cynicism is cheap, anybody can afford it; it is a diversion for a promiscuous and languid spectator.

The dimension of the sublime does not remain the same in the course of modernization; repressiveness is increasingly displaced by permissiveness. These concepts, too, are products of cynical thinking reducing values to the tools of power. Authentic values prevail in a different manner: not by forbidding or permitting, but by fascinating or repelling. 'Eating in Agora' that shocked the Greeks would not be understandable today without a comment. A lyrical character of autobiographic prose masturbates while watching a pornographic TV program in a hotel and switching it on again and again every few minutes in order to avoid extra charges.[3] Not only writers textually exhibit such private acts of desublimated eroticism; they are openly discussed in mass culture publications as innovative sexual practices. Another lyrical character is sobering up on the bank of the Nemunas River, drinks a bottle of beer, urinates into the bottle and throws it into the river.[4] Thus, the romantic bohemian's intent of shocking the bourgeois is ever present. However, the dimension of norm and value is so week and inconspicuous that nobody is shocked, and in Lithuania one should look for a bourgeois, a representative of middle class with a set of its characteristic values, in the Diogenian way: on a bright day with a torch. A *nouveau riche* is not *bourgeois*; he already has power but does not yet have corresponding values. The *Lumpenproletariat*, the domestic cynics, are not shocked either; they only giggle: "This is cool!" Some say that people write this way because of a hidden longing for something different, and yet the bottle with piss travels towards the Curonian lagoon, indistinguishable from thousands of other bottles, not so conceptual and nostalgic, thrown in just for the sake of a hooligan's excitement. This is our postmodern version of effacing hierarchical divisions.

Of course, it is possible to continue with the debasement of the remaining manifestations of the sublime. There is no doubt that cynical actions and words will be repeated in new contexts. Theoretical writings in the humanities are taking over the leftist cynical positions from contemporary Western authors and re-telling their ideas, as if our own huge experience

[3] See: S. Parulskis, "Kai aš gulėjau puikybės patale", in *Nuogi drabužiai*, Vilnius: Baltos lankos, 2002.

[4] See: S. Parulskis, "Pagirios", in A. Andriuškevičius, G. Beresnevičius, S. Geda, S. Parulskis, G. Radvilavičiūtė, *Siužetą siūlau nušauti*, Vilnius: Baltos lankos, 2002.

of cynicism requiring independent reflection did not exist. The debunking efforts of the new left continue under the guise of postmodernism, as if nothing has happened. But we can raise the question: what next? Is some kind of alternative thinking and acting possible in the situation of cynicism running into crisis at the moment of its triumph? Considering our present conditions and perspectives of thinking, the tectonic shift in our social basis and our consciousness of radical rupture seem to be of paramount importance. After all, we see the archaeological strata of thinking even without carrying out much analytical work, due to the landslide that has opened them to our view. The post-totalitarian experience shows that what I call the dimension of the sublime can be – and was – destroyed. The natural stability of this dimension has become anything but obvious; on the contrary, it is becoming clear how fragile it is. We know that a society can live on cynical foundations. However, our experience also shows what it is like.

It is here that the need of thinking, which would support fragile things, arises. Perhaps a post-cynical thinking could become such an alternative, since due to the massive experience of cynicism it would no longer have illusions about the spontaneous nature of the dimension of the sublime and would try to develop a new constructivism, take responsibility for the foundation and grounding of this dimension. Sloterdijk writes: "In a culture in which hardened idealisms make lies into a form of living, the process of truth depends on whether people can be found who are aggressive and free ('shameless') enough to speak the truth" (Sloterdijk 1988: 102). The title of a chapter in his *Critique of Cynical Reason* describes well the horizon of the author's objectives: "Pissing against the Idealist Wind". Well, how are we to behave in the far more severe spiritual climate where the materialist wind is blowing? What happens to culture and society in which fossilized materialism (the dialectical and simple one) has turned and keeps turning impudence into the universal form of life? This question has never been of such vital importance in the West; there has been no necessity to reflect radically on a situation symmetrical to cultural idealism, which, as a matter of fact, is gradually disintegrating over there as well.

The possibility of "telling the truth" will probably also depend on whether we have people who are firm and free enough to reveal and tell the truth. Of course, this would be a totally different truth. A brazen "pissing against" would not do in this situation. In our conditions radical thinking should be directed at reconstructing the foundations, defeating cynicism and taking responsibility for the whole. I would call it neither conservative (for I do not think we have much to conserve), nor restorational (for restoration has been discredited here; we would only obtain a historical kitsch). We should rather set a task of a radically critical reconstruction or new construction of

what allegedly has been discredited as camouflage but in reality turned out to be precisely *imponderabilia*: the structures supporting society's existence.

True, this kind of thinking would nearly always be projectionist and utopian and thus it would face the aforementioned and other unmentioned dangers. It is even moot whether the conditional mood, which we are forced to use when speaking about it, is sufficient or whether such words as "necessary", "should", or "need" are at all applicable to thinking, though we cannot avoid them here. Perhaps the only obligation that thinking has is to be itself, that is, to think. Radical thinking is something uncontrollable and it is impossible either to force it to definite conclusions or even to anticipate them. Yet we can still have a particular kind of anticipation – hope, since radical thinking has always been not only destructive, but also constructive. This most profound duality belongs to the essence of philosophical thinking. Moreover, it is very likely that thinking here and now constructively involves the use of the same drastic means of a purely personal word and action as those used by Diogenes.

The contents of such thinking would, of course, be the opposite. The alternative to the animal nature, the divine nature of man, sounds too scandalous; we do not yet dare to use this concept directly, unless we are fundamentalists or lovers of the noncommittally playful retro style. Well, let us then start from the lowest possible political level. Establishing and protecting a dimension of values is a concern that is obvious in any socially significant word or action. We are told that politics is the art of the possible. This classical dictum is very appealing to politicians of the present moment who do nothing else but manipulate opportunities that pop up right under their noses. Principles and distant goals are rejected as politically irrelevant and utopian. And yet the great or history making politics is not only actions significant on their own but also the creation of opportunities and paradigms for those actions. This is especially true and is of particular importance during dynamic transitional and revolutionary periods when each particular political action aspires to a principle, determines the possibilities and impossibilities of other actions, or sets the rules of the game as we are fond of saying: for these are perhaps the only kind of rules, a postmodern equivalent of the archaic taboo, that we are still ready to observe. Of course, this is a dangerous pursuit because the emerging fundamental possibilities are not necessarily all 'good'. They are a mixed bag, destructive and constructive, cynical and anti-cynical. These fundamental possibilities are being created and re-created inconspicuously at every moment; they weave inexorably into the fabric of everyday social thinking and acting thus determining our future.

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CINIZMAS: LIETUVIŠKASIS VARIANTAS

SANTRAUKA

Esė mėginama sučiuopti kelis būdingus dabartinės Lietuvos viešajame diskurse reguliariai besireiškiančius ciniškos teorinės ir praktinės mąstysenos bruožus, gretinant ją su graikų kinikų filosofija ir parodant esminius dabartinio čionykščio cinizmo panašumus bei skirtumus nuo šio paradigminio jo pavidalo. Dabartinio lietuviškojo cinizmo susiformavimas daugiausia siejamas su tarybinio laikotarpio viešuoju diskursu, ideologija ir valdžios praktikomis, taip pat antrojoje Lietuvos respublikoje atsiradusiomis jos transformacijos galimybėmis. Ypatingas dėmesys skiriamas dabartinio lietuviškojo cinizmo specifiniams bruožams ir esminiams jo skirtumams nuo atitinkamo vakarietiškojo reiškinių lauko, aprašyto Peterio Sloterdijko *Ciniškojo proto kritikoje*, į kuriuos paprastai neatkreipiamas deramas dėmesys. Nagrinėjamos kolizijos, į kurias atveda dabartinis cinizmas, ir svarstomos galimos šio mąstymo ir veikimo būdo alternatyvos.

RAKTINIAI ŽODŽIAI: cinizmas, kinikai, postsovietinis, *doxa*.