Dear Leszek Kolakowski,

First, I must introduce myself, since this is an unusual kind of letter. You don’t know me, but I know you well.

This must be familiar enough to a man with an international reputation. He must often be beset with the importunities of strangers.

But my claim is more insistent and vulgar than that. I am the stranger who walks into the house, slaps you on the back, sits down at your table, and jests about your youthful escapades, on the pretext of a claim to distant relationship of which you know nothing. I am, in political terms, your mother’s brother’s stepson. I am an impossible and presumptuous guest, and an uninvited one – you may even suspect that I am an impostor – but the courtesies of kinship disallow you from throwing me from your house.

We were both voices of the Communist revisionism of 1956. . . . But there was a closer and more continuing identity in our preoccupations. We both passed from a frontal critique of Stalinism to a stance of Marxist revisionism; we both sought to rehabilitate the utopian energies within the socialist tradition; we both stood in an ambiguous position, critical and affirmative, to the Marxist tradition. We both were centrally concerned with the radiating problems of historical determinism on the one hand, and of agency, moral choice, and individual responsibility on the other.

This first section consists of a fragment of a letter from E.P. Thompson, published as “An Open Letter to Leszek Kolakowski,” The Socialist Register (1973), pp. 1–100. Kolakowski’s full answer appears below (see footnote 3).
When I say that “we both” initiated similar enquiries, I don’t, of course, suggest that we both did so with equal success. The inadequacy of my own writings is testified to by the silence into which they have fallen. Your own writing, on the other hand, still seems to me to be among the few constructive and enduring consequences of that experience. Your sustained polemic, “Responsibility and History,” first published in Nowa Kultura in 1957, remains without equal.

In 1956 we lived through a common experience, but we experienced it in different ways. . . . You Poles were the worst old Adamists of All! Your poets – Tuwim and Wazyk – your film-makers and sociologists, and, worst of all, your Leszek Kolakowski. . . . Your voice was the clearest voice out of Eastern Europe in those years, although you didn’t offer the easiest answers. . . . But I was explaining a point of history, why I feel that I have some petty claim of relationship to you (I owe also, of course, for your writings and for your courage, in 1956 and again in 1966, a much greater debt). My claim is a trivial and abstract one. At a certain moment, partly out of a sense of solidarity with you and your comrades, I and others like me took up certain intellectual and political positions. We refused to disavow “Communism” because Communism was a complex noun which included Leszek Kolakowski. I am sure that the solidarity expressed in little, academically un-reputable journals in England did you no good whatsoever. We brought you neither thanks nor tank-traps; not even an audience among a “reputable” British public. . . . I feel, when I turn over your pages in Encounter, a sense of injury and betrayal. My feelings are no affair of yours; you must do what you think is right. But they explain why I write, not an article or polemic, but this open letter.

And yet – I return to the first lines of this letter – I have some right to speak frankly, for I am (or was) some kinsman of yours. There was a time when you, and the causes for which you stood, were present in our innermost thoughts. And in those days (only fifteen years distant!) whose meanings are now forgotten or falsified, when a “new left” was first projected, we shared another kinsman in our friend, C. Wright Mills. It was Mills who defined this relationship, in words better than any of mine:

I can no longer write seriously without feeling contempt for the indifferent professors and smug editors who so fearlessly fight the cold war, and for the cultural bureaucrats and hacks, the intellectual thugs of the official line who so readily have

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My Correct Views on Everything

abdicated the intellect in the Soviet Bloc. I can no longer write with moral surety unless I know that Leszek Kolakowski will understand where I stand. . . .

I do not think the time has gone by for such a struggle. I think it is with us, every day. In any case, can we meet one day and have a drink? I owe you more than one. And can we still drink to the fulfilment of that moment of common aspiration: “1956”? 

Yours fraternally,

E.P. Thompson

“My Correct Views on Everything: A Rejoinder to E.P. Thompson.”

Dear Edward Thompson,

Why I am not very happy about this public correspondence is because your letter deals as much (at least) with personal attitudes as with ideas. However, I have no personal accounts to settle either with Communist ideology or with the year 1956; this was settled long ago. But if you insist,

Let us begin and carry up this corpse
Singing together. . . .

In a review of the last issue of Socialist Register by Raymond Williams, I read that your letter is one of the best pieces of Leftist writing in the last decade, which implies directly that all or nearly all the rest was worse. He knows better and I take his word. I should be proud to have occasioned, to a certain degree, this text, even if I happen to be its target. And so, my first reaction is one of gratitude.

My second reaction is of embarras de richesses. You will excuse me if I make a fair choice of topics in my reply to your 100 pages of Open Letter (not well segmented, as you will admit). I will try to take up the most controversial ones. I do not think I should comment on the autobiographical pages, interesting though they are. When you say, for example,

3 Reprinted from The Socialist Register, 1974.
that you do not go to Spain for holidays, that you never attend a conference of Socialists without paying a part of the costs out of your own pocket, that you do not participate in meetings funded by the Ford Foundation, that you are like Quakers of old who refused to take off their hats before authorities, etc., I do not think it advisable to reply with a virtue-list of my own; this list would probably be less impressive. Neither am I going to exchange the story of your dismissal from the New Left Review for all the stories of my expulsions from different editorial committees of different journals; these stories would be rather trivial.

My third reaction is of sadness, and I mean it. Incompetent though I am in your field of studies, I know your reputation as a scholar and historian. I found it regrettable to see in your Letter so many Leftist clichés which survive in speech and print owing to three devices. First, the refusal to analyze words and the use of verbal hybrids purposely designed to confound the issues. Second, the use of moral or sentimental standards in some cases and of political and historical standards in other similar cases. Third, the refusal to accept historical facts as they are. I will try to say more precisely what I mean.

Your letter contains some personal grievances and some arguments on general questions. I will start with a minor personal grievance. Oddly enough, you seem to feel offended by not having been invited to the Reading conference and you state that if you had been invited you

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5 In 1956, after the Hungarian Revolution, Khrushchev insisted that the communist leaders in satellite communist countries organize trials of the revisionists, among them Kolakowski. Fortunately, Władysław Gomułka, the First Secretary of the Communist party of Poland, did not consent to this, but instead viciously attacked Kolakowski in 1957. In 1958 Kolakowski, along with other “revisionists,” was expelled from the influential weekly Nowa Kultura; in 1959, after the publication of “Karl Marx and the Classical Definition of Truth” (included in The Two Eyes of Spinoza and Other Essays on Philosophers [South Bend, Indiana: St. Augustine’s Press, 2004]), upon the request of the Soviets, he was expelled from Studia Filozoficzne, of which he was editor-in-chief. After delivering his famous speech on the tenth anniversary of the Polish October, Kolakowski found it difficult to publish anything. His translation of Spinoza’s works was published, however, without his name. He was also expelled from the editorial board of two prestigious collections in the Wydawnictwo Naukowe publishing house: Biblioteka Klasyków Filozofii (The Library of Classics of Philosophy) and Biblioteka Pisarzy Reformacyjnych (The Library of Reformation Writers).

6 The Reading conference – whose topic was “Is There Anything Wrong with the Socialist Idea?” (originally conceived as “What Is Wrong with the Socialist Idea?”) – was organized by Robert Cecil, Stuart Hampshire, Leszek Kolakowski, and George Weidenfeld, and sponsored by the publishing house Weidenfeld and Nicholson and the Graduate School of Contemporary European Studies, Reading University. The papers delivered at this
My Correct Views on Everything

would have refused to attend anyway on serious moral grounds. I pre-
sume, consequently, that if you had been invited, you would have felt
offended as well and so no way out of hurting you was open to the
organizers. Now, the moral ground you cite is the fact that in the organ-
izing committee you found the name of Robert Cecil. And what is sinis-
ter about Robert Cecil is that he once worked in the British diplomatic
service. And so, your integrity does not allow you to sit at the same table
with someone who used to work in British diplomacy. O blessed
Innocence! You and I, we were both active in our respective Communist
Parties in the ’40s and ’50s, which means that, whatever our noble inten-
tions and our charming ignorance (or refusal to get rid of ignorance)
were, we supported, within our modest means, a regime based on mass
slave labor and police terror of the worst kind in human history. Do you
think that there are many people who could refuse to sit at the same table
with us on these grounds? No, you are innocent, while I do not feel, as
you put it, the “sense of the politics of those years” when so many
Western intellectuals were converted to Stalinism.

From your casual comments on Stalinism, I gather that your “sense
of politics of those years” is obviously subtler and more differentiated
than mine. First, you say that a part (a part, I do not omit that) of the
responsibility for Stalinism lies with the Western powers. You say, sec-
ond, that “to a historian, fifty years is too short a time in which to judge
a new social system, if such a system is arising.” Third, we know, as you
say, “times when communism has shown a most human face, between
1917 and the early 1920s and again from the battle of Stalingrad to 1946.”

Everything is right on some additional assumptions. Obviously, in
the world in which we live, important events in one country are usually
to be credited in part to what happened in other countries. You will cer-
tainly not deny that a part of the responsibility for German Nazism lay
upon the Soviet Union. I wonder how this affects your judgment on
German Nazism?

Your second comment is revealing, indeed. What is fifty years “to a
historian”? The same day as I am writing this, I happen to have read a
book by Anatol Marchenko relating his experiences in Soviet prisons and
concentration camps in the early 1960s (not 1930s). The book was pub-
lished in Russian in Frankfurt in 1973. The author, a Russian worker, was
captured when he tried to cross the Soviet border to Iran. He was lucky
to have done this in Khrushchev’s time when the regrettable errors of
J.V. Stalin were over (yes, regrettable, let us face it, even if in part accounted for by the Western powers). And so he got only six years of hard labor in a concentration camp. One of his stories is about three Lithuanian prisoners who tried to escape from a convoy in a forest. Two of them were quickly caught, shot many times in the legs, ordered to get up (which they could not do), then kicked and trampled by guards. Finally, they were bitten and torn up by police dogs (such an amusement, survival of capitalism), and only then stabbed to death with bayonets. All this with witty remarks by the officer, of the kind “Now, free Lithuania, crawl, you’ll get your independence straight off!” The third prisoner was shot and, reputed to be dead, was thrown under corpses in the cart. Discovered later to be alive, he was not killed (de-stalinization!) but left for several days in a dark cell with his festering wounds. He survived only because his arm was cut off.

This is one of thousands of stories you can read in many now available books. Such books are rather reluctantly read by the enlightened Leftist elite. First, because they are largely irrelevant, second, they supply us only with small details (after all, we agree that some errors were committed) and because many of them have not been translated. (Did you notice that if you meet a Westerner who has learnt Russian you have at least 90% chance of meeting a bloody reactionary? Progressive people do not enjoy the painful effort of learning Russian. They know better anyway.)

And so, what is fifty years to a historian? Fifty years covering the life of an obscure Russian worker Marchenko or of a still more obscure Lithuanian student who has not even written a book? Let us not hurry to judge a “new social system.” Certainly I could ask you how many years you needed to assess the merits of the new military regime in Chile or in Greece, but I know your answer: there is no analogy – Chile and Greece remain within capitalism (factories are privately owned) while Russia started a new “alternative society” (factories are state owned, as is land, as are all its inhabitants). As genuine historians we can wait for another century and keep our slightly melancholic but cautiously optimistic historical wisdom.

Not so, of course, with “that beast,” “that old bitch, consumer capitalism” (your words). Wherever we look, our blood boils. Here we may afford to be ardent moralists again and we can prove – as you do – that the capitalist system has a “logic” of its own that all reforms are unable to cancel. The national health service, you say, is impoverished by the existence of private practice, and equality in education is spoilt because people are trained for private industry etc. You do not say that reforms are doomed to failure; you only explain that as long as reforms do not destroy capitalism, capitalism is not destroyed, which is certainly true.
And you propose "a peaceful revolutionary transition to an alternative socialist logic." You think apparently that this makes perfectly clear what you mean. I think, on the contrary, that it is perfectly obscure unless, again, you imagine that once the total state ownership of factories is granted, there remain only minor technical problems on the road to your utopia. But this is precisely what remains to be proved, and the onus probandi lies on those who maintain that these (insignificant "to a historian") fifty years of experience may be discarded by the authors of the new blueprint for the socialist society. (In Russia there were "exceptional circumstances," weren't there? But there is nothing exceptional about Western Europe.)

Your way of interpreting these modest fifty years (fifty-seven now) of the new alternative society is also revealed in your occasional remarks about the "most human face of communism" between 1917 and the early '20s and between Stalingrad and 1946. What do you mean by "human face" in the first case? The attempt to rule the entire economy by the police and army, resulting in mass hunger with uncountable victims, in several hundred peasants' revolts, all drowned in blood (a total economic disaster, as Lenin would admit later, after having killed and imprisoned an indefinite number of Mensheviks and SRs for predicting precisely that)? Or do you mean the armed invasion of seven non-Russian countries which had formed their independent governments, some socialist, some not (Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Ukraine, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia; God knows where are all these curious tribes live)? Or do you mean the dispersion by soldiers of the only democratically elected Parliament in Russian history, before it could utter one single word? The suppression by violence of all political parties, including socialist ones, the abolition of the non-Bolshevik press and, above all, the replacement of law with the absolute power of the party and its police in killing, torturing and imprisoning anybody they wanted? The mass repression of the Church? The Kronstadt uprising? And what is the most human face in 1942–46? Do you mean the deportation of eight entire nationalities of the Soviet Union with hundreds of thousands of victims (let us say seven, not eight; one was deported shortly before Stalingrad)? Do you mean sending to concentration camps hundreds of thousands of Soviet prisoners of war handed over by the Allies? Do you mean the so-called "collectivization" of the Baltic countries, if you have an idea about reality of this word?

I have three possible explanations for your statement. First, that you are simply ignorant of these facts. This I find incredible, considering your profession as a historian. Second, that you use the word "human face" in a very Thompsonian sense which I do not grasp. Third, that you, like most communists, both orthodox and critical, believe that
everything is all right in the communist system as long as the leaders of
the party are not murdered. This is, in fact, the standard way commu-
nists become “critical” – when they realize that the new alternative
socialist logic does not spare the communists themselves and in particu-
lar party leaders. Did you notice that the only victims Khrushchev men-
tioned by name in his speech of 1956 (whose importance I am far from
underestimating) were pur sang Stalinists like himself, most of them (like
Postychev) hangmen of merit with uncountable crimes committed
before they became victims themselves? Did you notice in memoirs or
critical analyses written by many ex-communists (I will not quote
names, excuse me) that their horror only suddenly emerged when they
saw communists being slaughtered? They always are pleading the inno-
cence of the victims by saying “but these people were communists”!
(Which, incidentally, is a self-defeating defense, for it suggests that there
is nothing wrong in slaughtering non-communists. This implies that
there is an authority to decide who is and who is not a communist, and
this authority can be only the same rulers who keep the gun.
Consequently, the slaughtered are by definition non-communists and
everything is all right.).

Well, Thompson, I really do not attribute to you this way of thinking.
Still I cannot help noticing your use of double standards of evaluation.
And when I say “double standards” I do not mean indulgence for the
justifiable inexperience of the “new society” in coping with new prob-
lems. I mean the use, alternately, of political or moral standards to simi-
lar situations. This I find unjustifiable. We must not be fervent moralists
in some cases and Real-politikers or philosophers of world history in oth-
ers, depending on political circumstances.

This is a point I would like to make clear to you if we are to under-
stand each other. I will quote to you (from memory) a talk with a Latin-
American revolutionary who told me about torture in Brazil. I asked:
“What is wrong with torture?” and he said: “What do you mean? Do you
suggest it is all right? Are you justifying torture?” And I said: “On the
contrary, I simply ask you if you think that torture is a morally inadmis-
sible monstrosity.” “Of course,” he replied. “And so is torture in Cuba?”
I asked. “Well,” he answered, “this is another thing. Cuba is a small
country under the constant threat of American imperialists. They have to
use all means of self-defense, however regrettable.” Then I said: “Now,
you cannot have it both ways. If you believe, as I do, that torture is
abominable and inadmissible on moral ground, it is such, by definition,
in all circumstances. If however there are circumstances where it can be
tolerated, you can condemn no regime for applying torture, since you
assume that there is nothing essentially wrong with torture itself. Either
you condemn torture in Cuba in exactly the same way you do for Brazil,
or you refrain from condemning the Brazilian police for torturing people. In fact, you cannot condemn torture on political grounds, because in most cases it is perfectly efficient and the torturers get what they want. You can condemn it only on moral grounds and then, necessarily, everywhere in the same way, in Batista’s Cuba, in Castro’s Cuba, in North Vietnam and in South Vietnam."

This is a banal but important point which I hope is clear to you. I simply refuse to join people whose hearts are bleeding to death when they hear about any, major or minor (and rightly condemnable), injustice in the US and suddenly become wise historiosophists or cool rationalists when told about worse horrors of the new alternative Society.

This is one, but not the only, reason for the spontaneous and almost universal mistrust people from Eastern Europe nourish towards the Western New Left. By a strange coincidence the majority of these ungrateful people, once they come to settle in Western Europe or in the US, pass for reactionaries. These narrow empiricists and egoists extrapolate a poor few decades of their petty personal experience (logically inadmissible, as you rightly observe) and find in it pretexts to cast doubt on the radiant socialist future, elaborated on the best Marxist-Leninist grounds by ideologists of the New Left for the Western countries.

This is a topic I will pursue somewhat further. I assume that we do not differ in accepting facts as they are and that we do not get knowledge of existing societies by deducing from a general theory. Again, I will quote my talk with a Maoist from India. He said: “The cultural revolution in China was a class struggle of poor peasants against kulaks.” I asked: “How do you know that?” and he replied: “From Marxist-Leninist theory.” I commented: “Yes, that is what I guessed.” (He did not understand, but you do.) This is not enough, however, for, as you know, any properly vague ideology is always able to absorb (meaning: to discard) all facts without giving up any of its ingredients. And the trouble is that most people are not dedicated ideologists. Their shallow minds work in such a way as if they believed that nobody has ever seen capitalism or socialism but only sets of small facts they are incapable of interpreting theoretically. They simply notice that people in some countries are better off than in others, that in some of them production, distribution, and services are much more efficient than in others, that here people enjoy civil and human rights and freedom and there they do not. (I should rather say “freedom” in quotation marks, as you do, to use the word “freedom” in quotation marks when applied to Western Europe. I do realize that this is a part of the absolutely obligatory Leftist spelling: what a “freedom,” indeed, enough to burst one’s sides with laughter. And we, people without a sense of humor, do not laugh.)
I am not trying to make you believe that you live in paradise and we in hell. In my country, Poland, we do not suffer hunger, people are not being tortured in prisons, we have no concentration camps (in contrast to Russia), in the last couple of years we have had only a few political prisoners (in contrast to Russia), and many people go abroad relatively easily (again, in contrast to Russia). Still, we are a country deprived of sovereignty, and this not in the sense Mr. Foot and Mr. Powell fear that Britain could lose her sovereignty because of joining the Common Market, but in a sadly direct and palpable sense: in that all key sectors of our life, including the army, foreign policy, foreign trade, important industries, and ideology, are under the tight control of a foreign empire which exerts its power with considerable meticulousness (e.g., preventing specific books from being published or specific information from being divulged, not to speak of more serious matters). Still, we appreciate immensely our margins of freedom when we compare our position with that of entirely liberated countries like the Ukraine or Lithuania which, as far as the right to self-government is concerned, are in a much worse situation than the old colonies of the British empire were. And the point is that these margins, important though they are (we can still say and publish significantly more than people elsewhere in the “ruble zone,” except for Hungary), are not supported by any legal guarantees at all and can be (as they used to be) canceled every night by a decision taken by party rulers in Warsaw or in Moscow. And this is simply because we got rid of this fraudulent bourgeois device of division of powers and we achieved the socialist dream of unity, which means that the same apparatus has legislative, executive, and judicial power in addition to its power of controlling all means of production; the same people make law, interpret it, and enforce it: king, Parliament, army chief, judge, prosecutor, policeman, and (new socialist invention) owner of all national wealth and the only employer at one and the same desk – what better social unity can you imagine?

You are proud of not going to Spain for political reasons. Unprincipled that I am, I was there twice. It is unpleasant to say that this regime, oppressive and undemocratic though it is, gives its citizens more freedom than any socialist country (except, perhaps, for Yugoslavia). I am not saying this with Schadenfreude, but with shame, keeping in mind the pathos of the civil war. The Spanish frontiers are open (never mind the reason, which is, in this case, thirty million tourists each year), and no totalitarian system can work with open frontiers. They have censorship after, and not before, publication (my own book was published in Spain and then confiscated, but only after one thousand copies had been sold”;

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7 *El hombre sin alternativa* (Madrid: Alianza Editorial, 1970), the translation of
we all should like to have the same conditions in Poland). You find in Spanish bookshops Mani, Trotsky, Freud, Marcuse, etc. Like us, they have no elections and no legal political parties, but, unlike us, they have many forms of organization which are independent of the state and the ruling party. They are sovereign as a state.

You will probably say that I am talking in vain because you clearly stated that you are far from seeing your ideal in the existing socialist states and that you were thinking in terms of a democratic socialism. You did, indeed, and I am not accusing you of being an admirer of the socialist secret police. Still, what I am trying to say is very relevant to your article for two reasons. First, you consider the existing socialist states as (imperfect, to be sure) beginnings of a new and better social order, as transitional forms which went beyond capitalism and are heading towards utopia. I do not deny that this form is new, but I do deny that it is in any respect superior to the democratic countries of Europe. I defy you to prove the opposite, i.e., to show a point in which the existing socialism may claim its superiority, except for the notorious advantages all despotic systems have over democratic ones (less trouble with people). The second, and equally important, point is that you pretend to know what democratic socialism means to you, yet you do not know. You write: “My own utopia, two hundred years ahead, would not be like Morris’s ‘epoch of rest.’ It would be a world (as D. H. Lawrence would have it) where the ‘money values’ give way before the ‘life values,’ or (as Blake would have it) ‘corporeal’ will give way to ‘mental’ war. With sources of power easily available, some men and women might choose to live in unified communities, sited, like Cistercian monasteries, in centres of great natural beauty, where agricultural, industrial and intellectual pursuits might be combined. Others might prefer the variety and pace of an urban life which rediscovers some of the qualities of the city-state. Others will prefer a life of seclusion, and many will pass between all three. Scholars would follow the disputes of different schools, in Paris, Jakarta or Bogota.”

This is a very good sample of socialist writing. It amounts to saying that the world should be good, and not bad. I am entirely on your side on this issue. I share without restrictions your (and Marx’s, and Shakespeare’s, and many others’) analysis to the effect that it is very deplorable that people’s minds are occupied with the endless pursuit of money, that needs have a magic power of infinite growth, and that the profit motive, not use value, rules production. Your superiority consists in that you know exactly how to get rid of all this and I do not.

the German collection of essays Der Mensch ohne Alternative: Von der Möglichkeit und Unmöglichkeit, Marxist zu sein.
Why the problems of the only existing communism, which Leftist ideologists put aside so easily (“all right, this was done in exceptional circumstances, we won’t imitate these patterns, we will do better,” etc.), are crucial for socialist thought is because the experiences of the “new alternative society” have shown very convincingly that the only universal medicine these people have for social evils (state ownership of the means of production) is not only perfectly compatible with all disasters of the capitalist world, with exploitation, imperialism, pollution, misery, economic waste, national hatred, and national oppression, but that it adds to them a series of disasters of its own: inefficiency, lack of economic incentives and, above all, the unrestricted role of the omnipotent bureaucracy, a concentration of power never known before in human history. Just a stroke of bad luck? No, you do not say exactly so, you simply prefer to ignore the problem, and rightly so. All attempts to examine this experience lead us back not only to contingent historical circumstances but to the very idea of socialism and the discovery of incompatible demands hidden in this idea (or at least demands whose compatibility remains to be proved). We want a society of small communities with a large autonomy, do we not? And we want central planning in the economy. Let us try to think now how both work together. We want technical progress and we want perfect security for people; let us look closer how both could be combined. We want industrial democracy and we want efficient management: do they work well together? Of course they do, in the leftist heaven everything is compatible and everything settled, lamb and lion sleep in the same bed. Look at the horrors of the world and see how easily we can get rid of them once we make a peaceful revolution toward the new socialist logic. The Middle East war and Palestinian grievances? Of course, this is the result of capitalism; let us make the revolution and the question is settled. Pollution? Of course, no problem at all, just let the new proletarian state take over the factories and there will be no pollution. Traffic jams? This is because capitalists do not care a damn about human comfort, just give us power (in fact, this is a rather good point, in socialism we have far fewer cars and correspondingly fewer traffic jams). People die from hunger in India? Of course, American imperialists eat their food, but once we make the revolution, etc. Northern Ireland? Demographic problems in Mexico? Racial hatred? Tribal wars? Inflation? Criminality? Corruption? Degradation of educational systems? There is such a simple answer to everything and, moreover, the same answer to everything!

This is not a caricature, not in the slightest. This is standard pattern of thought of those who have overcome the miserable illusions of reformism and invented a beneficial device for solving all problems of mankind, and this device consists in a few words which, when repeated
often enough, start looking as if they had content: revolution, alternative society, etc. And we have in addition a number of negative words to provoke horror, for instance “anti-communism” or “liberal.” You use these words as well, Edward, without explanation, aware though you must be that the purpose of these words is to mingle many different things and to produce vague negative associations. What is, in fact, the anti-communism you do not profess? Certainly, we know people who believe that there are no serious social problems in the Western world except for the communist danger, that all social conflicts here are to be explained by a communist plot, that the world would be a paradise if only sinister communist forces did not interfere, and that the most hideous military dictatorships deserve support if only they suppress communist movements. You are not anti-communist in that sense? Neither am I. But you will be called anti-communist if you do not strongly believe that the actual Soviet (or Chinese) system is the most perfect society the human mind has invented so far, or if you wrote a piece of purely scholarly work on the history of communism without lies. And there is a great number of other possibilities in between. The convenience of the word “anti-communism,” the bogey-man of leftist jargon, is precisely to put all of them in the same sack and never to explain the meaning of the word. The same with the word “liberal.” Who is a “liberal”? Perhaps a nineteenth-century free-trader who proclaimed that the state should forbear from interfering in the “free contract” between workers and employers and that workers’ unions were contrary to the free contract principle? Do you suggest that you are not “liberal” in this sense? This is very much to your credit. But according to the unwritten revolutionary OED, you are “liberal” if you imagine in general that freedom is better than slavery (I do not mean the genuine, profound freedom people enjoy in socialist countries, but the miserable formal freedom invented by the bourgeoisie to deceive the toiling masses). And the word “liberal” has the easy task of amalgamating these and other things. And so, let us proclaim loudly that we spurn liberal illusions, but let us never explain exactly what we mean.

Should I go on with this progressive vocabulary? Just one more word which, I emphasize, you do not use in this sound sense: “fascist” or “fascism.” This is an ingenious discovery, with a fair range of applications. Sometimes a fascist is a person I disagree with but, because of my ignorance, I am unable to debate with, so I would do better to kick him. When I collect my experiences, I notice that a fascist is a person who holds one of the following beliefs (by way of example): 1) that people should wash themselves, rather than go dirty; 2) that freedom of the press in America is preferable to the ownership of the whole press by one ruling party; 3) that people should not be jailed for their opinions, both
communist and anti-communist; 4) that racial criteria, in favor of either whites or blacks, are inadvisable in admission to Universities; 5) that torture is condemnable, no matter who applies it. (Roughly speaking, “fascist” was the same as “liberal.”) A fascist is, by definition, a person who happened to have been in jail in a communist country. The refugees from Czechoslovakia in 1968 were sometimes met in Germany by very progressive and absolutely revolutionary leftists with placards saying, “fascism will not pass.”

And you blame me for making a caricature of the New Left. I wonder what such a caricature would be. Still, your irritation (this is one of the few points where your pen flares up) is understandable. You quote from an interview I gave to the German Radio (and later translated from German into English and published in *Encounter*) two or three general sentences where I expressed my disgust with New Leftist movements, as I knew them in America and Germany, but – this is the point – I did not specify which movements I meant. I said instead vaguely “some people” etc. This means that I did not specifically exclude the *New Left Review* in 1960–63 when you were associated with it or I even tacitly included you in my statement. Here you got me. I did not specifically exclude the *New Left Review* in 1960–63 and, I admit, I did not even keep it in mind when I was talking to the German journalist. I thought that to say “some new leftists,” etc. is rather like saying, e.g., “some British academics are drunkards.” Do you think that many academics would be offended by such a (admittedly not very ingenious) statement, and if so, which ones? My comfort is that if I happen to say publicly such things on the New Left, my socialist friends somehow never feel that they could be included even if they are not specifically excluded.

But I cannot delay any longer. I hereby solemnly declare that in an interview to the German Radio in 1971, when I was talking about leftist obscurantism, I was not thinking of the *New Left Review* in 1960–63, with which Edward Thompson was involved. Will that be all right?

You are right, Edward, that we, people from Eastern Europe, have a tendency to underestimate the gravity of the social issues democratic societies face and we may be blamed for that. But we cannot be blamed for not taking seriously people who, unable though they are to remember correctly any single fact from our history or to say which barbaric dialect we speak, are perfectly able instead to teach us how liberated we are in the East. Neither can we take seriously those who have a rigorously scientific solution for humanity’s illnesses, and this solution consists in repeating a few phrases we heard for thirty years on each celebration on the 1st of May and read in any party propaganda brochure. (I am talking about the attitude of progressive radicals; the conservative attitude to the problem of the East is different and can be summarized...
briefly: “This would be awful in our country, but for these tribes it is good enough.”

When I was leaving Poland at the end of 1968 (I had not been in any Western country for at least six years), I had a somewhat vague idea of what the radical student movement and different Leftist groups or parties might be. What I saw and read I found pathetic and disgusting in nearly all (still, not all) cases. I do not shed tears for a few windows smashed in demonstrations. That old bitch, consumer capitalism, will survive it. Neither do I find scandalous the rather natural ignorance of young people. What impressed me was mental degradation of a kind I had never seen before in any Leftist movement. I saw young people trying to “reconstitute” universities and to liberate them from horrifying, savage, monstrous, fascist oppression. The list of demands, with variations, was very similar on campuses all over the world. These fascist pigs of the Establishment want us to pass examinations while we are making the revolution; let them give all of us A grades without examinations. Curiously enough, the anti-fascist warriors wanted to get their degrees and diplomas in such fields as mathematics, sociology or law, and not in such as carrying posters, distributing leaflets or destroying offices. And sometimes they got what they wanted. The fascist pigs of the Establishment gave them grades without examinations. Very often there were demands for abolishing altogether some subjects of teaching as irrelevant, e.g., foreign languages (these fascists want us, internationalist revolutionaries, to waste time in learning languages. Why? To prevent us from making world revolution). In one place revolutionary philosophers went on strike because they got a reading list including Plato, Descartes, and other bourgeois idiots, instead of relevant great philosophers like Ché Guevara and Mao. In another, revolutionary mathematicians passed a motion that the department should organize courses on the social tasks of mathematics and (this is the point) each student should be able to attend this course as many times as he wanted and each time get credit for it, which meant that he could get the diploma in mathematics exactly for nothing. In still another place, the noble martyrs of the world revolution demanded to be examined only by other students they would choose themselves, and not by these old reactionary pseudo-scholars. Professors should be appointed (by students, of course) according to their political views, students admitted on the same grounds. In several cases in the US, the vanguard of the oppressed toiling masses set fire to university libraries (irrelevant pseudo-knowledge of the Establishment). Needless to say, you could hear that there is no difference, no difference at all, between life on a California campus and a Nazi concentration camp. And all were Marxists, of course, which meant they knew three or four sentences written by Marx or Lenin, in particular the sentence “the
philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point, however, is to change it” (what Marx wanted to say in this sentence, it is obvious to them, was that it made no sense to learn).

I could carry on this list for pages but this may suffice. The patterns are always the same: the great socialist revolution consists, first of all, in giving us privileges, titles, and power for our political opinions and in destroying the old reactionary academic values like knowledge and logical abilities (but these fascist pigs should give us money, money, money).

And what about the workers? There are two rival views. One (pseudo-Marcusian) says that these bastards were bribed by the bourgeoisie and one cannot expect anything more from them. Now the students are the most oppressed and the most revolutionary class of society. Another (Leninist) says that workers have a false consciousness and do not understand their alienation because the capitalists give them wrong papers to read, but we, revolutionaries, store in our heads the correct consciousness of the proletariat. We know what the workers should think and, in fact, do think without knowing it; consequently we deserve to take power (but not in this stupid electoral game which, as has been scientifically proved, is just for deceiving the people).

You say complacently “revolutionary farce.” All right, it is. But to say this is not enough. This is not a farce capable of turning society upside down, but it is capable of destroying the university. This is a performance worth worrying about (some German universities already look like party schools).

Let us go back to the more general question we discussed earlier in private letters. You defend the movement I just described by saying “. . . but there was a Vietnam war.” Very much so, indeed, to put it elegantly. And many other things, no doubt. Traditional German universities had some intolerable features. Italian and French universities had others of their own. There are many things in any society and in any university to justify protest. And this is my point: you will find no political movement in the world which has no good and well justified claims. If you look at mutual accusations of parties vying for power you always find some well-chosen and well-grounded points in their claims and attacks, and you do not take it as a reason to support all of them. Nobody is altogether wrong, and you are right, of course, in saying that those who joined the communist parties were not altogether wrong. When you look at Nazi propaganda again in the Weimar Republic, you will find a great number of well-justified points. They said that the Versailles Treaty was a shame, and it was; that the democracy was corrupted, and it was; they attacked aristocracy, plutocracy, the power of bankers and, incidentally, the pseudo-freedom, irrelevant to the real needs of the people and
serving dirty Jewish newspapers. But this was not a good reason to say “all right, they do not behave very decently and some points in their ideas are rather silly, but they are not wrong in many questions, so let us give them a qualified support.” At least, many people refused to say so. In fact, had the Nazis not had many good points in attacking the existing regime, they would not have won, and there would not have been such a phenomenon as the ranks of Rotfront passing with unfolded colors over to the SA. This is the reason why, when I saw movements imitating the same patterns of behavior and imitating a part of the same ideology (viz. in all points concerning “formal” freedom and all democratic institutions, tolerance, and academic values), I could not be strongly impressed by the observation: “but there was a Vietnam war.”

You say that we should help the blind to recover their sight. I accept this advice with a slight restriction: it is difficult to apply when you have to do with people who are omniscient and all-seeing anyway. I do not remember having ever refused a discussion with people who were ready to have one. The trouble is that some were not ready, and this precisely because of their omniscience, which I lacked. True, I was almost omniscient (yet not entirely) when I was twenty years old, but, as you know, people grow stupid when they grow older. I was much less omniscient when I was twenty-eight and still less now. Nor am I capable of satisfying those who look for perfect certainty and for immediate global solutions to all the world’s calamities and misery. Still, I believe that in approaching other people we should, as far as we are able to do so, follow the Jesuit, rather than the Calvinist, method. This means, we ought to presuppose that nobody is totally and hopelessly corrupted, that everybody, no matter how perverted and limited, has some good points and some good intentions. This is admittedly easier to say than to practice and I do not think that either of us is a perfect master in this maieutic art.

* * *

Your proposal to define yourself (and myself) by the allegiance to the “Marxist tradition” (as opposed to the system, the method, the heritage) seems to me elusive and vague. I am not sure of the meaning you confer on this attachment unless you simply find it important to be called “Marxist,” but you say you do not. Neither do I. I am not interested at all in being “a Marxist” or in being so called. There are certainly only a few people working in the human sciences who would not acknowledge their debt to Marx. I am not one of them. I readily admit that without Marx our thinking about history would be different and in many respects worse than it is. To say this is rather trivial. Still, I think
that many important tenets of Marx’s doctrine are either false or meaningless, or else true only in a very restricted sense. I think that the labor theory of value is a normative device without any explanatory power whatsoever; that none of the well-known general formulae of historical materialism to be found in Marx’s writings is admissible and that this doctrine is valid only in a strongly qualified sense; that his theory of class consciousness is false and that most of his predictions proved to be erroneous (this is admittedly a general description of what I feel, I am not trying to justify my conclusions here). If I admit nevertheless to still thinking, in historical (not in philosophical) matters, in terms inherited in part from the Marxist legacy, do I accept an allegiance to the Marxist tradition? Only in such a loose sense that the same statement would be equally true if I substituted for “Marxist” – “Christian,” “skeptical,” “empiricist.” Without belonging to any political party or sect, to any Church, to any philosophical school, I do not deny my debt to Marxism, to Christianity, to skeptical philosophy, to empiricist thought and to a few other traditions (more specifically Eastern-European and less interesting to you). Neither do I share the horror of “eclecticism” if the opposite of eclecticism is philosophical or political bigotry (as it usually is in the minds of those who terrify us with the label of eclecticism). In this poor sense, I admit to belonging to the Marxist tradition, among others. But you seem to imply more. You seem to imply the existence of a “Marxist family” defined by spiritual descent from Marx and to invite me to join it. Do you mean that all people who in one way or another call themselves Marxist form a family (never mind that they have been killing each other for half a century and still are) opposed as such to the rest of the world? And that this family is for you (and ought to be for me), a place of identification? If this is what you mean, I cannot even say that I refuse to join this family; it simply does not exist in a world where the great Apocalypse can most likely be triggered by a war between two empires both claiming to be perfect embodiments of Marxism.

*     *     *

In your letter there are several points which I should broach not because of their importance but because of the unpleasantly demagogic way you discuss them. I will take up two of them. You quote an article of mine containing a remark which I thought was a platitude: that exploited classes have not been allowed to participate in the development of spiritual culture. You appear as a spokesman of the excluded working class and you explain to me, with indignation, that the working class developed a sense of solidarity, loyalty, etc. In other words, I said
this rather to deplore than to exalt the fact that the exploited were denied access to education and you show disgust at my alleged view that the working class has no morals. This is not a misreading but a sort of absurd Hineinlesen, which makes any discussion impossible. And then, when I stigmatized as obscurantist the idea of a new, socialist logic or science (again, a truism, as I saw it), you explain that the point is not to change logic but that Marx wanted to change property relations. Did he, really? Well, what can I say except that you opened my eyes? And if you think that the question of a “new logic” or “new science” as opposed to “bourgeois logic” and “bourgeois science” was not at issue, you are entirely wrong. This was not an extravagance but a standard pattern of thinking and talking among Marxist-Leninist-Stalinists. These patterns were inherited intact by the dozens of Lenins, Trotskys, and Robespierres you could find on any American or German campus.

The second point is your comment on one sentence I uttered in the same interview you quoted. It said that “men have no fuller means of self-identification than through religious symbols” and that “religious consciousness . . . is an irreplaceable part of human culture.” Here, you explode: “By what right (you say), what study of its tradition and sensitivity, may you assume this as a universal in the heart of an ancient Protestant Island, doggedly resistant to the magic of religious symbolism. . . .” I apologize for many reasons. First, that I gave my interview to a German journalist in the heart of the ancient Protestant Island instead of doing this on German soil. Second, that I failed to explain – which I assumed, wrongly, to be known – that a “religious symbol” is not necessarily, contrary to what you obviously believe, a picture, a sculpture, a rosary etc., but everything people believe that gives them a way of communicating with the Supernatural or conveys its energy. (Jesus Christ himself is a symbol, not only a crucifix.) I did not invent this use of the word but, since I did not explain it in my interview, I offended your iconoclastic English tradition. Does this lexical explanation appease somewhat your Protestant conscience hurt by a superstitious Ultramontanist? And you accuse me – that beats everything – of not justifying, in this interview, my belief in the permanence of the religious phenomenon. It was indeed thoughtless not to quote entirely, in this interview, all the books and articles I have written on the subject to support this view. You had no reason whatsoever to read these books (one of them, over eight hundred dense pages, and dealing mostly with sectarian movements of the seventeenth century, is so boring that it would be inhuman to ask you to wade through it) – at least you had no such reason as long as you
were not trying to criticize my views on the subject. Therefore your indignant “By what right . . .” seems to be more appropriate when retorted to you.

Unfortunately, your article teems with instances when you shift the subject and try to make yourself believe that I said something you think I should have said, on the basis of some general beliefs you attribute to me. I am sure you do this unconsciously, according to a peculiar logic of beliefs which has always been very characteristic of dogmatic communist thinking, where the difference between those reasonings which are truth-functional and those which are not entirely disappears; however, even if it were true that A entails B, it would not follow that if someone believes A, he believes B. The willful rejection of this rather unsophisticated distinction has always allowed the communist press to give its readers information constructed approximately in this way: “The American President said that, in defiance of the protest of the whole of peace-loving mankind, he would carry on with the genocidal war in Vietnam” or “Chinese leaders declare that their jingoist, anti-Leninist policy aims at the destruction of the socialist camp in order to help imperialists.” There is a consistency in this grotesque Wonderland logic and I rather dislike its echoes in your reasoning. But there is more than that. Since you think about society in categories or global “systems” – capitalism or socialism – you believe that: 1) socialism, imperfect though it is, is essentially a higher stage of mankind’s development, and this superiority of the “system” is valid irrespective of whether or not it can be shown in any particular facts related to human life; 2) all negative facts to be found in the non-socialist world – apartheid in South Africa, torture in Brazil, hunger in Nigeria, or inadequate health service in Britain are to be imputed to the “system,” while similar facts occurring within the socialist war have to be accounted for by the “system” as well, yet not socialist, but the same capitalist system (survival of the old society; impact of encirclement etc.); 3) whoever does not believe in the superiority or the socialist “system” so conceived is bound to believe that “capitalism” is in principle admirable and to justify or to conceal its monstrosities, i.e., to justify apartheid in South Africa, hunger in Nigeria etc. Hence your desperate attempts to force me to say something I have not.

AMID MOVING RUINS

My Correct Views on Everything

(True, since you consider my case not entirely lost, you try to wake up my conscience and explain, for example, that there are spies and bugging devices in Western countries. Really? Are you not joking?) Needless to say, this peculiar way of reasoning is absolutely irrefutable because it is able to neglect all empirical facts as irrelevant (anything bad that happens within the “capitalist system” is by definition the product of capitalism; anything bad that happens in “the socialist system” is by the same definition the product of the same capitalism). Socialism is defined within this “system-thinking” as total or nearly total state ownership of the means of production. You obviously cannot define socialism in terms of the abolition of hired labor, since you know that if empirical socialism differs in this respect from capitalism, this is only in restoring direct slave labor for prisoners, half-slave labor for workers (abolition of the freedom to change one’s place of work) and the mediaeval *glebae adscriptio* for peasants. So, within this construction it is consistent to believe that with the abolition of private ownership the roots of evil, if not all actual evil, on earth are eradicated. But these three statements I mentioned are nothing else but the expression of an ideological commitment, incapable of being either validated or disproved empirically. You say that to think in terms of a “system” yields excellent results. I am quite sure it does, not only excellent, but miraculous; it simply solves all the problems of mankind in one stroke. This is why people who have not reached this level of scientific consciousness (like myself) do not know this simple device for the salvation of the world, that is known to any sophomore in Berlin or Nebraska, viz. the socialist world revolution.

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I have obviously not exhausted the topics of your text, which restores the dignity of the vanishing art of epistolography. But I believe I have touched on the most controversial ones. The gulf dividing us at the moment is unlikely to be bridged. You still seem to consider yourself a dissident communist or a sort of revisionist. I do not see myself this

10 L. Kolakowski’s final split with official communist ideology can be traced back to 1966, when, on October 21, he delivered the speech “The Development of Polish Culture in the Last Decade” on the tenth anniversary of the Polish October at Warsaw University. (The transcript of this speech, recorded at the meeting by agents of the security police and recently discovered in the Archives of the Communist Security Police, was published in *Dzieje Najnowsze*, No. 4 [1994]). A few months later Kolakowski was viciously attacked by Władysław Gomułka, the First Secretary of the Polish Communist Party, as the “main ideologue of the so-called revisionism,” and was removed from its ranks. On March 25, 1968, after the delivery of another
way, and have not for a very long time. You seem to define your position in terms of discussions from 1956, and I do not. This was an important year and its illusions were important, too. But they were crushed just after they appeared. You probably realize that what was labeled “revisionism” in the people’s democracies is virtually dead (possibly with the exception of Yugoslavia), which means that both young and old people in these countries stopped thinking about their situation in terms of “genuine socialism,” “genuine Marxism,” etc. They want (more often than not in a passive way) more national independence, more political and social freedom, better living conditions, but not because there is anything specifically socialist in these claims. The official state ideology is in a paradoxical position. It is absolutely indispensable, for it is the only way in which the ruling apparatus can legitimate its power; and it is believed by nobody – neither the rulers nor the ruled (both well aware of the unbelief of the others and of their own). In Western countries, virtually every intellectual who considers himself socialist (and even communist) will admit in private talk that the socialist idea is in deep crisis; few will admit this in print. Here buoyant jauntiness is obligatory and we must not sow doubt and confusion “among the masses” or supply our foes with arguments. I am not sure if you agree that this is a self-defeating policy. I rather think you do not.

In the meantime some traditionally socialist institutions seem to have crept into capitalist societies in a rather unexpected way. Even the most short-sighted politicians realize now that not everything can be bought for money; that a moment might come when no money will buy us clean air, clean water, more land or wasted natural resources. And so, “use value” comes back, slowly, into the economy. A paradoxical “socialism” resulting from the fact that mankind does not know what to do with garbage. The result is growing bureaucracy and the growing role of power centers. The only medicine communism has invented – centralized, uncontrolled, state ownership of national assets and one-party rule – is worse than the illnesses it is supposed to cure; it is less efficient economically and it makes the bureaucratic character of social relations an absolute principle. I appreciate your ideal of the decentralized society
with a large autonomy for small communities and I share your attach-
ment to this tradition. But it is silly to deny powerful forces resulting
from technological development itself, and not from the existence of pri-
vate property, leading toward greater and more powerful central
bureaucracy. If you pretend to know a simple means to cope with this sit-
uation, if you imagine you have found the solution in saying, “we will
make a peaceful revolution and socialism will reverse this trend,” you
delude yourself and fall victim to verbal magic. The more society
depends on the complex technological network it created, the more
problems have to be regulated by central powers, the more powerful
state bureaucracy becomes, the more political democracy and more “for-
mal” “bourgeois” freedom is needed to restrain the ruling apparatus and
and secure for individuals their shrinking rights to remain individuals.
There will never be, and there cannot be any economical or industrial
democracy without political (“bourgeois”) democracy with everything it
entails. We do not know how to harmonize the contradictory tasks con-
temporary society imposes upon us. We can only try to reach an uncer-
tain balance between these tasks because we have no blueprint for a con-
ictless and secure society. I will repeat what I wrote once elsewhere: “In
private life there is the attitude of those who think about how to gain at
one blow the capital that would allow them to spend the rest of their life
without worries, in peace and security; and there is the attitude of those
who must worry about how to survive until tomorrow. I think that
human society as a whole will never be in the happy position of a pen-
sioner, living on dividends and having the guarantee of secure life to the
end, thanks to capital once acquired. Its position will be rather similar to
that of a journeyman who must worry about how to survive until tomor-
row. Utopians are people who dream about ensuring for mankind the
position of pensioner and who are convinced that this position is so
splendid that no sacrifices (in particular no moral sacrifices) are too great
to achieve it.”

This does not mean that socialism is a dead option. I do not think it
is. But I do think that this option was destroyed not only by the experi-
ence of socialist states, but because of the self-confidence of its adherents,
by their inability to face both the limits of our efforts to change society
and the incompatibility of the demands and values which made up their
creed. In short, that the meaning of this option has to be revised entirely,
from the very roots.

And when I say “socialism” I do not mean a state of perfection but
rather a movement trying to satisfy demands of equality, freedom, and
efficiency, a movement that is worth the trouble only as far as it is aware
not only of the complexity of problems hidden in each of these values
separately but also of the fact that they limit each other and can be
implemented only through compromises. We make fools of ourselves and of others if we think (or pretend to think) otherwise. All institutional changes have to be treated entirely as a means at the service of these values and not as ends in themselves. They must be judged correspondingly, taking into account the price we pay in one value when we reinforce another. Attempts to consider any of these values as absolute and to implement them at all costs, not only are bound to destroy the other two, but must lead to the destruction of the other one as well. Nota bene, this is a discovery of venerable antiquity. Absolute equality can be established only within a despotic system of rule which implies privileges, i.e., destroys equality; total freedom means anarchy and anarchy results in the domination of the physically strongest, i.e., total freedom turns into its opposite; efficiency as a supreme value calls again for despotism and despotism is economically inefficient above a certain level of technology. If I repeat these old truisms it is because they still seem to go unnoticed in utopian thinking; and this is why nothing in the world is easier than writing utopias. I wish we could agree on this point. If we do, we can agree on many others, even after exchanging a few caustic remarks, which, I hope, we will be generous enough to forgive each other. Such agreement will be much less likely if you keep believing that communism was in principle an excellent contrivance, somewhat spoilt in less than excellent application. I hope to have explained to you why, for many years, I have not expected anything from attempts to mend, to renovate, to clean up or to correct the communist idea. Alas, poor idea. I knew it, Edward. This skull will never smile again. 11

Yours in friendship,

Leszek Kolakowski

11 An allusion to Shakespeare’s Hamlet, Act V, scene 1, ll. 172–84: First Clown: “Here’s a skull now hath lain you i’ th’ earth three and twenty years . . .”; Hamlet: “[Let me see.] [Takes the skull.] Alas, poor Yorick. I knew him, Horatio . . .” Editor’s note.