

INTRODUCTION

We are honoured to present the 60th issue of *Politeja. Journal of the Faculty of International and Political Studies of the Jagiellonian University* dedicated to the reflection on interconnections between literary studies, language acquisition, linguistics, as well as translation studies and the concept of Open Society, proposed by Karl Popper as the only reasonable form of political framework for the present day world in his 1945 landmark book, *The Open Society and Its Enemies*. As Popper indicates in the Introduction to his extensive critique of Plato's, Marx's and Hegel's totalitarian aspirations, the Open Society, synonymous in his analysis with a democratic society, should be based principally on four pillars: humaneness, reasonableness, equality and freedom. The papers included in this issue explore ways in which academic disciplines gathered under the common label of "philology" engage with and promote these values, especially in the settings of a university class.

Popper wrote *The Open Society and Its Enemies* in a state of great emergency, when the World War II was ravaging the globe and two superpowers – the Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union were fighting for authoritarian, anti-democratic supremacy over Europe. The former failed, giving way to democratic forces which enabled the construction of prosperous modern societies; the latter prevailed, impeding, for over half a century, a natural growth of life on half of the continent, as Vaclav Havel put it in his 1995 Chancellor's Lecture at the Victoria University of Wellington, NZ¹. Does democracy have anything to do with flourishing, with the growth of life? As it turns out, a great deal.

*A good democratic government allows people to pursue their lives in safety, protected from the violence of anarchy, and in freedom, protected from the violence of tyranny. For that reason alone, democracy is a major contributor to human flourishing. But it's not the only reason: democracies have higher rates of economic growth, fewer wars or genocides, healthier and better-educated citizens, and virtually no famines*².

¹ V. Havel, *Karl Popper's The Open Society and Its Enemies in the contemporary global world*, [in:] K. Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, London–New York 2011, p. XII.

² S. Pinker, *Enlightenment Now*, London 2019, pp. 199-200.

There is a large body of studies confirming the positive relation between living in a stable democracy and life satisfaction and/or well-being³. Hence promoting or combating the ideals advocated by Popper, the classical liberalism ideals the most distinguished Enlightenment thinkers had stood for cannot be reduced to an abstract ideological war; at the end of the day it does mean taking a stance for or against life, for or against human flourishing.

In the recent years we have once again witnessed a surge in anti-democratic movements across the developed world. Is that a reason for despair? By no means. As Popper points out, the forces directed at undermining democracy are as old as democracy itself. Their incremented activity should provoke a strong counter-reaction on behalf of those who hold the values of freedom, equality, humaneness and reasonableness dear, in line with the conviction that *the future depends on ourselves, and we do not depend on any historical necessity*⁴. This issue of *Politeja* is an expression of faith and hope in the potential of a collective effort informed by science to uphold and improve the democratic societies we live in (cf. José Luis Bellón Aguilera's article in the present issue), and thus to further Popper's agenda of constructing an ever better environment for the development of each and every human being.

Nevertheless, it is important to emphasise that Popper is not a utopian; he alerts his readers to the fact that every change, even if for the better, entails simultaneously a whole new range of challenges. Thus, a society that makes a pledge to be open assumes responsibility for the problems that may appear as a result of the consistent application of the ideal of openness – Germany can be cited as a close-to-home example of such a situation, having experienced first-hand consequences, positive and negative ones, of the influx of non-European migrants since 2015. The topic of a new human element in the community – the Other, has become a significant motif in the humanist thought over the last fifty years, as researchers respond to the progressive social changes in our globalised society, defined by enhanced communication and mobility. Consequently, intensified attempts to understand the Other and reformulate our relation to him/her can be seen in philosophy (from Levinas to Derrida to Agamben and Latin American *decolonial* theories), pragmatic linguistics, literary theories and studies (feminist, gender and queer theories, postcolonial theories and modern comparative studies), and, obviously, social sciences, with its large body of research on migration and intergroup clashes. The papers gathered in this issue of *Politeja* confirm the necessity of taking into account the problems that arise when people, with their linguistic and cultural heritage, are removed far away from the place of origin of their traditions and ways of living. Such phenomena as new and hybrid language uses (cf. Ingrid Petkova), translation's efficiency (cf. Marta Paleczna), language and culture didactics (cf. Dominika Dzik, Paola González, Mercè Ballepí), social inclusion processes (cf. Olga Grzyś), and

³ Eg. cf. R. Loubser, C. Steenekamp, *Democracy, Well-being, and Happiness: A 10-nation Study*, "Journal of Public Affairs" 2017, vol. 17(1-2); M. Orviska, A. Čaplánová, J. Hudson, *The Impact of Democracy on Well-being*. "Social Indicators Research" 2014, 115(1).

⁴ K. Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, London–New York 2011, p. XXXVII.

multicultural transactions (cf. Paola Bellomi) have become important challenges not only for the people affected by, and participating in, these processes, but also for scholars. Contemporary life runs in a space which does not fit the definition of a linguistically and culturally homogeneous nation-state anymore; as far as we know, states have never been such homogenous entities, except for the case of nationalist *imagined communities*, whose validity is being questioned now (cf. Wojciech Browarny). Attentive to the changes taking place in their environment, numerous researchers in the field of Comparative and Cultural Studies are focusing their research efforts on the implications of the intensive contacts – as a matter of fact, the most intensive ever – between individuals and ethnic groups coming from different backgrounds (cf. Paulina Pająk). Similarly, the literary analysis presented in this issue focuses on the coexistence of many social statuses, ideologies and discursive formations which cross and intertwine in contemporary societies (cf. Nina Pluta, Olga Grzyś).

Variety and instability seem to be inherent characteristics of the present-day societies, most of them struggling to live up to the ideal of serene cultivation of rational and civic virtues (cf. María José Bruña). It is, however, all the more reason to keep searching for new forms of individual and collective civic ethics. Possible paths to follow have been traced in articles on the civic commitment of philosophy (cf. Teresa Aguado) and those discussing ways of including ethics in university teaching (cf. Shelley Godsland, Alexander González, Olga Nowak, Ewelina Topolska).

The large scope of topics covered on the following pages constitutes evidence of the complexity of cultural processes in the supra-national era, which can be grasped only with interdisciplinary instruments. We can interpret the multidirectional expansion of humanist research presented in this issue as an attempt to find better ways of managing an old dialectical contradiction between the instinctive, tribal urges and the demands of reason; at the end of the day the Open Society model expresses Popper's, and other progressives', faith in the ability of the human being to overcome him/herself.

Ewelina Topolska
Nina Pluta