

PIOTR BARTULA¹

US AND NOTHING

Abstract

Perhaps everyone is familiar with Aristotle's view that man is a cultural, social and political animal: ". . . And he who by nature and not by mere accident is without a state, is either a bad man or above humanity; he is like the 'Tribeless, lawless, hearthless one,' whom Homer denounces – the natural outcast is forthwith a lover of war; he may be compared to an isolated piece at draughts." Although Aristotle's view seems obvious, at first sight, it is not so. This is evidenced by the numerous examples of recluses, outsiders, stateless persons, anarchists who dismiss belonging to a state or world culture, thinking nothing of them. Thus, there they feel observed, spied upon, assessed, censored, directed, sized-up, priced, marked, lectured, tied, robbed, repressed, degraded, examined, baited, derided, plundered, judged, manipulated, sold-out, conscripted, corrected, socialised, punished and homeless. These views unmask the political, social and cultural "Us", as a mask hiding the anarchistic and pre-social "Nothing".

Key words: Nothing, Us, Kaspar Hauser, Salomon Perel, political animal

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Furthermore:

The proof that the state is a creation of nature and prior to the individual is that the individual, when isolated, is not self-sufficing; and therefore he is like

¹ Assoc. Prof.; Jagiellonian University in Kraków; e-mail: piobartula@gmail.com.

a part in relation to the whole. But he who is unable to live in society, or who has no need because he is sufficient for himself, must be either a beast or a god: he is no part of a state (ibid.).

Directed by the spirit of contrariness, I will add Friedrich Nietzsche's comment: "Aristotle says that in order to live alone one must be either an animal or a god. The third alternative is lacking. A man must be both; a philosopher" (Nietzsche, 2013, p. 7).

Of course, Aristotle was not naïve and knew that people break laws, both natural and positive, and can be distrustful, vile, licentious and ill-mannered. However, the state is the fate or destiny of man: "Now, that man is more of a political animal than bees or any other gregarious animals is evident." Teleologically, although the state demands trust and mutual friendship, deluded trust causes enormous damage and disappointment: ". . . the spirit within us is more stirred against our friends and acquaintances than against those who are unknown to us" (Aristotle, 1885, Book Seven, Part VI).

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In the anarchistic gallery of asocial figures furthest removed from the social, political and cultural world is found he:

who in 1828 at Pentecost,
to Nuremberg did come a poor boy lost,
from a letter in his hand it was hereby told,
his wish to be a cavalryman bold (cited by Werner Herzog).

Kaspar Hauser, who is here referred to, was found having no idea of his surroundings, unable to speak or pray but only able to sign his name. The municipal authorities took care of his upbringing, but following several years of being the subject of an educational experiment, Hauser was killed by unknown assailants. Books have been written and films made about

him. The Polish philosopher Bronisław Trentowski maintained the legend that he had been born the heir to a throne and had been destined to rule and govern. Although he had been deliberately raised as an animal, once he had begun to regain his humanity he was exterminated in fear of his testimony. The figure of Hauser has also served as to weave analogies between his fate and the fate of one held in the darkness of uncultured people who eventually, however, achieves the power he deserves.² Indeed, it seems that he has achieved this today!

Although in view of the quite poor intellectual level of the mythical natural man this would constitute confirmation of Aristotle's thesis, on the other hand, his innate mildness would refute it. The riddle of a stranger from nowhere indicates a fundamental factor of the controversy around the cultural and political nature of man. Kaspar Hauser was born outside society, went through a phase of socialisation but still remembered life alone as having been better: "Then, when I had not yet come here, I never had such pain in my head and was not tormented as I am now, since I have been here" (Handke, 2009, p. 29). As an acultural and asocial person, he never showed aggression, anger or ambition, with the world of rivalry being entirely foreign to him. At the sight of a soldier with a sword in hand, he would not have fought or fled as he possessed enormous trust towards the world around him. Although he was no beast, he was as far from God as a beast, all the more for the fact that in his simple mind he did not find the concept of the Supreme Being, thereby driving a theology scholar to despair. Although he did not possess an innate sense of formal logic, he did have enough common sense to solve the liar paradox, asking him the question "Are you a red frog?" One by one, he uncovered the concept of God, logic, time and space, ethical imperatives as artificial social products and belief based on violence and/or trust in school, church and state institutions. He was a radical nominalist, treating all general concepts in the collective pseudonym "Us" as a barely voiced breath.

² "With people as the unfortunate Kaspar Hauser this is what happens. He was supposed to have been born as the heir to a throne and was destined to rule and govern. At that time, he was deliberately raised as an animal but when fate allowed him to be delivered into the hands of human friends and come back to his own feelings as a prince, he suffered the blow of a murderer. Is this not the never-ending story of human affliction?" (Trentowski, 1974, p. 74). All translations from Polish come from Marzena McNamara unless indicated otherwise.

The philosophical moral of Hauser's story is simple in its own Rousseauian, romantic and existential meaning: a person comes from nowhere but we see him everywhere in cultural chains and social roles. Here, in recalling the name of Rousseau, one should state some minor reservations. We know his statement that "man is born free but everywhere he is in chains." But what does this actually mean? It is, as if to say, that man is born a cultural fascist but everywhere we see him fighting for peace until everything is razed to the ground.

In the mythological medium of Kaspar Hauser is it even worse, after all freedom – and its division into negative and positive forms – are already cultural categories. This is how person really comes from nowhere as a social and existential "Nothing" but everywhere we see him subjected to the pressure of "Us" which creates a transparent State of the Sun as living in gloomy counter-cultural spaces only gives rise to unnecessary thoughts. Thus, a cruel society forces us into uniforms and epaulettes, shoves rapiers into our hands, dresses us in togas, surplices and academic gowns. Under the social mask, however, every one of us still remains a mystical anarchist who, for the sake of survival, must practice the art of cultural opportunism or die without a position, stabbed with a knife or offered hemlock by advocates of the "common good". And here is the whole mystery of existence: do not allow yourself to be killed by those who have been told they are someone better than NOTHING.

According to Peter Handke, society makes, as it were, in every Hauser (every one of us) an "Us" system of language which restrains and imprisons us. Behind the façade of a sleepy town (Nuremberg or Cracow) always hides a system of social control destroying intruders, losers, strangers from the primeval den of "Nothing" – an existential stateless person from conventional good and evil, beauty and ugliness, truth and falseness, faith and atheism, culture and civilisation (Handke, 2009).³

Every "I"/"Nothing" is then moulded and shaped by "Us" – the agents and police, who therefore fiercely train in the gym of social control: historical, cultural, religious and scientific policies. Experts in social-gymnastics wrap a collar of rosary beads made of guilt around "Kasper's" neck in order to carry him off to the Last Judgement while deriving sadistic pleasure from lashing him with a moral whip of syllogisms. The whip, "collectively

³ See also the film by Werner Herzog entitled *The Enigma of Kaspar Hauser*.

Us”, falls on Kaspar’s (Handke, 2009, p. 46)⁴ back who in the end “resembles a picture of a manikin in an exhibition devoted to domestic culture” (p. 41).

In the drama *Iwona, Princess of Burgundy* [*Iwona, księżniczka Burgunda*] a similar case, in essence, is presented by Witold Gombrowicz, an activist of the culturally empty “I” entangled with forms of nothingness. The eponymous “Princess of Burgundy” (a version of Kaspar), a mute almost not able to say anything – a shapeless “Nothing” – concentrates the frightened attention of the court upon herself, which in the end induces someone “culturally foreign” to choke on a courtly dish (carp).⁵ They make her – in self-defence, as it were – participate in this herself on the principle: either “Us” – the Court, or the “Asocial Nothing” – with deadly threats of order and social rituals in which a chamberlain is a chamberlain, a king is a king, a prince is a prince, a peasant is a peasant and a priest is a priest.

The counter-cultural courage of Prince Philip to bring “idiots” to the court is a liberating attempt to counterbalance the established order. Thus, marrying a beautiful, clever and cultured person is no art as any boor can do it. However, falling in love with a Nobody is an act of cultural liberation – here, one should display the aristocratic will to power:

Yes, I am sufficiently rich to become engaged to someone exceptionally poor. Why should I only like a beautiful woman? Am I not allowed to like an ugly one? Where is it written? Where is the law to which I should bend as a soulless organ and not a free person? (Gombrowicz, 2015, p. 22–23).

Fundamentally, every one of us who is an educated whisperer makes the entire system of cultural beliefs. I, for example, grew up in Catholic Poland, did not choose my gender, country, language or whether I was to be

⁴ In accordance with Handke’s interpretation, each one of us is led through whispering to speaking with the aid of material speech (2009, p. 26); “. . . is taught a model of views with the aid of which a decent person makes it through life” (p. 43); “. . . you are free to think that which you say, as you also have to think as you say, as you are not allowed to think differently from what you say” (p. 55).

⁵ This recalls the anecdote of the fox who calls together a meeting of pheasants and turkeys in order to discuss cultural issues, namely: in which dishes they would like to be eaten for supper. When they declare that they do not want to be eaten at all, the fox replies “Please, do not stray from the subject.”

baptised or not. I believe that I imbibed faith in God at my mother's breast and if my father had had milk to give I would have got it from my father's milk also. In other words, I have the impression that God has coercively accompanied me since I was a child. Even the desire to confirm or deny his existence results from pre-philosophical ideas and subservience to instilled cultural models. I once heard that God lives in Poland but holidays in Paris. Indeed, since the time I was a child I heard that mankind had sinned in Adam, had atoned in Christ, that although only innocence atones, I, being subjectively innocent, participate in collective guilt in some strange way. Since I was a child as I have been repeating that in sinning in thought, word, action or neglect, I suffer from the non-culpable guilt of original sin of "Us", although I had done nothing as an individual to deserve it. On the other hand, I am, however, grateful that Polish "cultural models" do not require me to place a visible sign of my religious affiliation on my person. In this sense, I feel free physically, culturally and politically as in existentially liminal situations I could hide and mask my Catholic identity, pretend that I am someone else – that I am Nobody.

Not all of those who believe differently from me have had this luxury in the 20th century. This recalls the example of Solomon Perel (another version of Kaspar), the main character of Agnieszka Holland's film *Europa, Europa*. This is based on the fact that almost from the beginning of his conscious life he became aware that he was guilty but not knowing why. The circumcision, which was to join the boy to a cultural-religious-political community and issue him with a visible sign of his religious, social and racial identity, has become a mark of stigma of non-culpable guilt: that which was meant to be platform opening his mind, heart and senses to the intellectual, cultural and religious legacy has become a vehicle to nothingness. Therefore, in circumstances of the influence of Nazi ideology, this meant a psychological and existential initiation into the nothingness of the world. That which in the intentions of parents was meant to have strengthened the youth's cultural and religious identity, does not allow him to be himself in the new social conditions. On the contrary, it becomes the cause of numerous psychological, political and sexual mishaps, since the youth has to conceal his nakedness from his lover in the Hitler Youth – thus, this was a culturisation and politicisation of nakedness, one whose unmasking is lethal. Desiring to survive in the world of this new Leviathan, Solomon changed his masks – sometimes of hostile and sometimes of friendly

ideologies.⁶ These would be typical symptoms of the lethal process leading to the death of cultural identity, to the disease of an acquired deficit in human nature – to nothingness. Following such awful events, it is no surprise that people fear the shadow of their own national-cultural identity.⁷

A more uplifting example of a stateless person than Kaspar Hauser is Diogenes the Cynic. His behaviour was both part animalistic and part divine, certainly not pro-society and even less pro-state. He has entered history as a philosophical down-and-out scorning society and political authority. His uncouth statement “Stand out of my sunlight” directed at Alexander the Great has given rise to admiration among political and government dissenters up to today. He lived as a nomad, pissing into the idealistic wind of all conventions and cultural theories. He did not wish to be Aristotle’s “featherless biped”, he rather preferred to remain an unplucked chicken performing public masturbation. May one, however, describe such kinds of activities as manifestations of cultural freedom or just normal boorishness?⁸ Undoubtedly, however, this youthful symbol of self-sufficiency makes him the first anarcho-libertarian. He lived in a system unknown to Aristotle: egocentric, living in a clay wine jar, thus not as a trusting part

⁶ The figure of Perel was also the main character of the book entitled *Hitler’s Jewish Soldiers: The Untold Story of Nazi Racial Laws and Men of Jewish Descent in the German Military* by Bryan Mark Rigg (Lawrence, University Press of Kansas, 2002).

⁷ This is recalled in a book by Ernest Gellner (2009, p. 81): “A concept of not belonging to any nation requires a great deal of acrobatics from today’s imagination. Chamisso, a French emigrant during the Napoleonic period, wrote a wonderful proto-Kafkaesque novel about a man who had lost his own shadow. Although the charm of the book is based, among other things, on intended ambiguity, it is difficult not to suspect that for the author a Man without a Shadow is a Man without a Nation. When the acquaintances of Peter Szlemiel discover his disconcerting property, they begin to avoid him, although he lacks nothing else apart from his shadow. Someone who does not have their own nation, is an affront to commonly accepted categories and offends public opinion.”

⁸ “Someone took him into a magnificent house and warned him not to expectorate, whereupon having cleared his throat he discharged the phlegm into the man’s face, being unable, he said, to find a meaner receptacle” (Diogenes Laertius, 1968). There are various accounts on the subject of the death of Diogenes: some believe that he received a fatal dog bite, others that he died “by holding his breath”. No matter how this occurred, following his death one Cercidas of Megalopolis compared him to a dog: “Not so he who aforesaid was a citizen of Sinope, / That famous one who carried a staff, doubled his cloak, and lived in the open air. / But he soared aloft with his lip tightly pressed against his teeth / And holding his breath withal. For in truth he was rightly named / Diogenes, a true-born son of Zeus, a hound of heaven.”

of a kingdom, aristocracy or polity, or a tyranny, oligarchy or democracy to a lesser degree. He was rather an activist of misanthropy, a biophile dismissing the artificial world of the city and its conventions. He was a social Nobody in the complete sense of its meaning. However, in order to be Nobody, one has to be Somebody – a hound, but a Hound of Heaven.

Emil Cioran describes a contemporary “Diogenes” in the form of a flute player in a café, a tramp who sleeps under bridges or in great hotels, earning lots of money but spending it all:

During our encounter, I said to him: Listen, you’re the greatest philosopher in Paris, the only great contemporary one. And he replied: You’re making a fool of me, you’re mocking me. I protested: Not at all. I said that to you because you live, you contemplate all the time; you experience your problems while they are interwoven with your life. He lived in a manner recalling the Greek philosophers who orated on the streets and in the markets. That which they said, was in line with life itself (Cioran, 1999, p. 87).

Socrates himself was also in conflict not only with democratic Athens but also with the entire politico-cultural sphere of the polis. Although it is true he lived at the cost of the city as the unbearable child of Athenian democracy and was for a time tolerated and maintained by the politico-cultural system, he was eventually forced to drink a quite bitter dose of hemlock. While he stood, therefore, on the basis of real democracy, he had promoted an anti-democratic system of values amongst the young. The decision to accept this political sentence and decline escape places him between cultural anarchy, civic nothingness and government legalism – regarding civil disobedience. Socrates is a great anarcho-legalist who died, however, on a position of civil law.⁹

As a continuator of both positions one must mention another disobedient citizen, Henry David Thoreau. If Hauser was thrown into an urban world from his own burrow, myself, Thoreau (and Socrates) have taken a conscious decision to abandon the so-called cultural polis which is really a fountain of nothingness: evil, slavery, war and degeneration. As a Platonist without political ambitions, he tore up the social contract and in the name of asocial egocentricism withdrew to the shores of a lake where

⁹ Socrates was right to choose death and not escape: “Do you imagine that a state can subsist and not be overthrown, in which the decisions of law have no power, but are set aside and overthrown by individuals?” (Plato, 1984, XI B).

he consumed home-grown fruit. However, this self-imposed exile was not completely successful since the town came for the deserter. He kept himself, therefore, on the point of the border of culture and the state of nature, thereby presenting the opportunity for the powers that be to conduct a tax inspection in the person of a tax collector who came to reprimand a citizen desiring to be only (and just) an apolitical Nobody. As a result of this tax incident, Thoreau was deemed a criminal and spent a night in prison but was released once an aunt had paid what was “owed” to the government (reportedly to the great dismay of the accused). This disobedient citizen declared the existence of a pre-state consciousness which the state wished to question, destroying “I”, the person, for “Us”, the citizens. The person is above the state, the state is evil and not an Aristotelian common good. Thoreau reveals particular distrust and contempt of the state, as a form of nothingness, in the following words:

The mass of men serve the state thus, not as men mainly, but as machines, with their bodies. They are the standing army, and the militia, jailers, constables, posse comitatus, etc. In most cases there is no free exercise whatever of the judgment or of the moral sense; but they put themselves on a level with wood and earth and stones; and wooden men can perhaps be manufactured that will serve the purpose as well. Such command no more respect than men of straw or a lump of dirt (Thoreau, 1849).

On this lump of dirt Behemoth pays homage to Leviathan (as communicated by Piotr Bartula):

Let the slenderness of my body not deceive you nor the tender white of the neck, the brightness of the open forehead, the down on the sweet lip, the cherubic smile, the sprightly step. Let not my innocence move you, nor my purity, tenderness and simplicity, or the cut of jacket, trousers or Hugo Boss socks. Let not the brightness of my phosphorous eyes paralyse you as from them shines splendour, enchantment, magic, beauty, sumptuousness, magnificence, prestige and a Gnostic certainty of work well done. It is I who conducted the betrayal for which there are no mitigating circumstances, no justification. I did not have any parents, no genes nor any bad experiences from my childhood; I am not Russian, Chechen, Ukrainian, German, Polish, Chinese, Tibetan, Serbian, Croatian, Sunni or Shiite, man or woman, local or newcomer, black or white. I am not affected by socio-biology, behavioural psychology or psychoanalysis as I walk legless over cultures, nations, races, not considering the colour of anyone’s skin, height, muscular build, accuracy

of eyesight and brain capacity. Your literature, poetry, plays and films adore the pictures of nothingness which I have painted. The aesthetics of violence, denunciation and death is a specialisation at my university. It is for you that I weave thousands of tales of demonism, crime, vengeance, greed, perversion, hatred and war. You prefer to hear about gamblers, alcoholics, drug addicts, those who committed suicide, tramps, nomads and heartbreakers than good citizens and fathers of families. Take the world away from me and the bars, gambling houses and shopping malls will disappear. It is for me that the best fashion designers work as you prefer the splendour of the robes of popes, kings and princes and not the coarse attire of beggars, monks, hermits and the apostles. It is I that causes those who are cruel to have more freedom if they wear chic uniforms and sing catchy songs. It is I who is the apostle of your beautiful disasters: the enchanting Austrian, the Georgian minister, the killer of moneylenders from St. Petersburg. It is thanks to me that human nature is wild, unpredictable, cruel and beautiful. My portrait of Dorian Gray shows that youth and aesthetic beauty is worth committing the sin of crime which is a symbol of human freedom. My act of creating the nothingness of the temporal state was absolutely ingenious. A result of this determined ingenuity is your contemporary universal fear and total lack of trust, the essential active existence of the Tyrant freeing himself from the tyranny of his neighbour. Let every one of you consider yourselves armed when you travel and try to find yourselves in good company. Let them consider what he thinks of your countrymen when he travels armed anyway; and what does he think of the inhabitants of a town when he bolts the doors; and what he thinks about his children and servants when he closes his chests. Here, does he not charge all of humanity? The whole dimension of power, social discipline has been created only due to me. I cause all uncertain property, dangerous agreements and threatened dangers. It is for me that you establish the police, arm young boys training them how to shoot, use stratagems and interventions. Without me there are no uniforms, epaulettes, ranks and discipline. It is I who is the original substitute for creative power. It is for me that you train armies of undercover agents present in stadiums, city streets and village markets. It is because of me you fear losing sight of your baggage at airports, railway stations and playgrounds. It is for me that groups of detectives work in shops, banks and public buildings. It is due to me that in the doors of every school a guard in a black outfit stands while numerous cameras ready to undercover my presence are located in the corridors of government offices and universities. In this way, I am carrying out my sophisticated plan of Secular Panopticism. It is for me you oil the guillotine, repair the drop on the gallows and the electric chair, and sterilise syringes of death. The executioner's sword is only

forged because you fear my dagger, my revolver, my baseball bats. It is for me you put locks on your doors, train bulldogs, put bars on your windows and fence off your property, build fortified castles and prisons, put on crowns, shoot cannons, carry muskets, brandish lances and banners, start battles, place curses and issue anathemas. It is due to me that you may trust no one but must suspect everyone. It is on my wishes that you must send a priest for whom the only justification for an act requiring confession is my crime, my "sin", my nothingness. It is for me that you train sociologists and psychologists designated for the rehabilitation of those who sell my services. It is for me you safeguard your property by depositing it in a bank, hiding it in your socks or under a floorboard. Already from birth you heard from your parents: don't trust strangers (or acquaintances), don't show anyone your expensive toys because you will draw jealousy upon yourself (or cheap ones, as you will draw contempt), hide your ideas because they will be copied, insure your home because they will come to take, burn or rob it. Don't open the door to anyone; whoever knocks on the door calling for help could be me: me – the thief, me – the kidnapper, me – the false saint, me – the rapist, me – the poisoner, me – the robber, me – the harbinger of violence, me – the nobody. Your sons will pass on to their sons and daughters Konrad Wallenrod's evil infinity of the kiss of Almanzor, with they subsequently passing it on to their sons and grandsons, thereby creating generation after generation of mistrust:

With a kiss I infected your soul
 With a venom which eats you away
 Go and look at me in agony whole
 You all have to die anyway (Mickiewicz, 1846, p. 75)

The whole dimension of power, all social discipline has been created by me and for me. Take the social world from me and the entire deprivation of your legal inventions and philosophical tracts concerning the philosophy of law will be revealed, written in regard to myself. The whole dimension of power, all social discipline has been created only due to me. It was on my wishes that Leviathan was created, a god armed with the lethal weapons of sword and crosier, with cannons and anathemas. I speak to you as the Prime Mover of the temporal state – I who is directed crosswise, in opposition, creating chaos, a deceiver, a slanderer, a tempter, a killer, an accuser, the governor of this world, the angel of darkness, the sower of discord. I speak to you as Asmodeus, Azazel, Belial, Abaddon, Mastema, Samael, Lilith, Shedim.

I speak to you, I – the agent of the Deadly God of Nothingness formed from the waste of the Universal Distrust of your "Us" (through Piotr Bartula).

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