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VYTAUTAS KAVOLIS: TOWARD A POLYLOGUE OF CIVILIZATIONS

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Present-day civilizational analysis differs much from that of the classical exponents of the comparative study of civilizations, such as Oswald Spengler, Arnold J. Toynbee, or Pitirim A. Sorokin. In social philosophy and sociology, the civilizational dimension is regaining its significance; this had been lost since Max Weber.

Civilizations as the largest comprehensible and theoretically identifiable units have been analyzed in the works of such major civilizational analysts and theorists of comparative civilizations as Norbert Elias, S. N. Eisenstadt, Louis Dumont, Benjamin Nelson, Ernest Gellner, and Vytautas Kavolis. They are all interdisciplinary scholars, whose work would be unthinkable without their efforts to bridge the humanist and social science disciplines, using the comparative perspective as a means to build up an inclusive theory of the social sciences and humanities.

The exponents of civilizational analysis and the history of consciousness – the latter represents a congregation that includes Philippe Ariès, Michel Foucault, Vytautas Kavolis, Hayden White, and Louis Dumont, although its origins might be traced back to *Geistesgeschichte* – as predominant methodologies in the context of the comparative study of civilizations are perfectly aware that the concept of civilization can serve as a means of symbolic and real exclusion, not only inclusion. This is why it significantly enhances our intellectual responsibility and attentiveness to the political and moral implications of the ways we understand ourselves and others.

The following problematical foci represent the conceptual frame within which current exponents of civilizational analysis tend to describe civilizations as:

1. consisting of social structure and symbolic organizations;
2. symbolic designs (such as symbolic authority, power, configuration of values and ideas);
3. explanatory and interpretive frameworks within which people search for the concepts and frames of meaning to explain themselves and the world around them;
4. world religions and spiritual traditions;

5. the links bridging the realms of the secular and the sacred;
6. theories dealing with world history and with the phenomena of consciousness and culture in terms of coherence;
7. mentalities/histories of mentalities;
8. the relationships between theories and practices;
9. the ensembles of interrelated and complementary cultures in terms of style and common values or;
10. the controlling principles of social/political action and of creative endeavor (among early, or "classical," theorists of civilizations who substantially contributed to the study of the controlling principles of comparative civilizations Oswald Spengler and Pitirim A. Sorokin should be mentioned first; among current civilizationists, we could list Louis Dumont, Francis L. K. Hsu, and Takie Sugiyama Lebra).¹

Vytautas Kavolis's Concept of Civilization

Kavolis' intense, thorough, and impeccable scholarship allows us to theoretically reconstruct the discursive map of the concept of civilization.

His theoretical concerns and the frame of reference range from the classical exponents of sociological thought and civilization theory (Max Weber, Marcel Mauss, Pitirim A. Sorokin, and Norbert Elias) to the mainstream of the contemporary Anglo-American and European social scientists and humanists. In his contributions, Kavolis names Benjamin Nelson a major contributor to the civilization-analytic perspective, although it is beyond any doubt that Kavolis's own name and scholarship have become inseparable from this perspective and from civilization theory.

It is very important to theoretically reconstruct and describe in detail Kavolis's concept of civilization, since his theory of nationalism can only be properly understood within the framework of his civilization theory.

In his last book, *Civilization Analysis as a Sociology of Culture*, which may be regarded as his major contribution to civilization theory, Kavolis defines the civilizational approach in the following way:

The civilizational approach differs from other schools of thought in sociology in taking as its primary object of study the symbolic designs within which social action is located. These designs are examined in their empirical specificity, in their historical trajectories, and in com-

parative perspective as frameworks from which human actors derive their conceptions of action, of its purposes, and of themselves.... Civilizational sociologists seek to understand how these designs evolve and are put together within a civilization (the largest comprehensible unit of sociocultural study) – and how people draw upon them in constituting their actions both in the ordinary circumstances of their lives and in the critical junctures of their histories. Civilizational sociologists claim that this approach is necessary for an adequate understanding of major sociological processes, such as political transformations, religious and economic “rationalizations of the world” and antimodernist reactions to them, and shifts in self-comprehension.²

Having defined the civilizational approach, Kavolis engages in mapping two modes of being of civilizational sociology. The analysis of Louis Dumont and S. N. Eisenstadt’s theories of the rise of modern individualism enables Kavolis to make the important distinction between nomothetic and ideographic approaches to the comparative study of civilizations a pivotal issue in the philosophy of the social sciences since neo-Kantians.

This last major contribution of Kavolis to civilization analysis raises a number of questions crucial for the social sciences and humanities, ranging from the paradigms of order and the coherence of cultures to the models of collective identity and civilizational processes in contemporary Eastern Europe.³ In tracing the ancient and modern images of order and disorder, Kavolis comes to reconstruct the symbolic designs, or paradigms of order, within which the historical and cultural imaginations, blueprints for social and moral order, political power structures, and institutional networks operate over time. The paradigms of order are: “the lawful and spontaneous natures,” “the order of the factory,” and “the order of the work of art.”

The concept of “lawful nature” sheds new light not only on the mediaeval practices of exorcism, witch hunts, the struggle against earthly representations and agencies of evil, demons, fiends, and *maleficia*, but also on Sigmund Freud’s dictum, “Biology is destiny,” not to mention the dichotomizing of the realm of cultural and moral categories into “righteousness” and “transgression,” “purity” and “pollution,” “sanity” and “madness,” “true consciousness” and “illusion.” Hence, Kavolis offers a remarkable insight into inversions of structure that occur within lawful nature:

Where either hierarchy or dichotomy is present, the possibility of

inversion —turning the world upside down, sanctification or transgression, Satanization of an earlier set of deities, the aesthetics of ugliness, resurrection from the dead, the perception of “madness” as a superior kind of “health” — is always a live possibility, whether tempting or threatening. Inversion of structure is possible only within lawful nature. (p. 63)

Having started from his illuminating and elegant insights into the nature of the mediaeval feasts of fools, carnivals, and other anti-structural phenomena (in this, Kavolis relies on such scholars as Victor Turner and Mikhail Bakhtin), Kavolis examines the concepts and patterns of chaos and order in Hinduism, in Chinese religions and social thought, in Judeo-Christian cosmology and theology, and in Marxist social philosophy.

Kavolis’s analysis of the order of the factory reveals the roots of magical and technocratic consciousness, of the sociological concepts of “mega-machines,” and of the notions of economic and technological efficiency.

The historical roots of the factory conception of order may be sought in magic, in the sociological “mega-machines” by which the ancient civilizations accomplished the building of pyramids and irrigation works, in Chinese Legalism, and especially in the Christian God’s assignment to men of the obligation to transform the face of the earth in accordance with divine specifications. The machine, in much of its earlier history, and in the notion of the *machina mundi*, was used as the explanation of how the universe, or a particular part thereof, operates, not as the instrumentality for changing it.... It was a revolutionizing of this view of the machine attained under the influence of spiritual presuppositions — of which Puritanism has been in modern times perhaps the most outstanding — that made it the technological foundation of the factory. The early technologists have been interpreting the world, the ideologists first thought of changing it. (p. 71)

Thus, an elegant allusion to Karl Marx’s 11th thesis on Ludwig Feuerbach — “Up till now the philosophers have only interpreted the world; the point, however, is to change it” — underlines Kavolis’s great theoretical ambition to grasp how the great ideas, concepts, explanatory systems, and interpretative frameworks come to shape social reality. They transform themselves into ideological programs, political doctrines, technological innovations, and finally, into paraphernalia of a mass anonymous society — a world of factories, offices, bureaucracy, and “rationalization.” The question arises: What kind of symbolic

design or pattern of civilization or interpretative framework might be identified behind the rise of capitalism and the genesis of modern bureaucracy?

As Kavolis clearly demonstrates, the efficiency, within the symbolic framework for the order of the factory, is achieved at the expense of other crucial social and moral faculties of human existence.

When social action is oriented to the symbolic framework of the factory, it has an immense capacity of producing specified types of effects (whether victories in sports or in warfare, capitalistic affluence or revolutionary reconstruction of society), but it does so at the cost of destroying the larger natural, social, and moral contexts within which the desired changes are located (*ibid.*).

By employing the factory metaphor, Kavolis attempts in-depth exploration of the difference between a totalitarian factory and the plural factories of the free market.

Finally, the analysis of the paradigm of the order of the work of art allows Kavolis to present his remarkable insights into the structural isomorphisms and similarities between the modern artistic enterprise and its ideologies – “in which the artist is still dimly perceived as the secularized shadow of the Judeo-Christian Creator God” (p. 80) – on the one hand, and the “aesthetization of politics” inherent in authoritarian or even totalitarian political images and practices, on the other (p. 78). We can recall here the phenomenon of the “aesthetization of politics” as deeply characteristic of Italian Fascism, the latter having been enthusiastically endorsed by a number of eminent Italian artists of that time.

Kavolis was at his best when he successfully combined his theoretical sophistication, analytical incisiveness, empirical evidence, and existential experience derived from what he recognized as his cultural background. It is little wonder that Kavolis’s insights into the models of collective identity, social movements, and civilizational processes in Eastern Europe are, in a way, reminiscent of the brightest examples of the comparative study of Central/East European nationalism and of European studies in general.

The way in which Kavolis describes the former Soviet Union as a failed project of modernization, and Communism as an alternative and rival civilization, is worthy of the best passages of Raymond Aron, Ernest Gellner, Leszek Kolakowski, and Czeslaw Milosz.

The Soviet Union has for seventy years endeavored to produce a new civilization by establishing a secular version of the religion-above-

culture paradigm as its center. The result was a pattern most similar, among contemporary civilizations, to that of the Islamic world, except that (1) a *secular* religion was placed in the position of superordination to all culture, and (2) this secular religion was, in contrast to Islam, not deeply embedded in the attitudes of the “masses” or the “intellectual elites.” It therefore has remained an artificial entity, not a “genuine civilization” capable of attracting adherence even without the use of violence; a failed effort in a boundary region of the West to become a civilizational alternative to it.... This pattern has now collapsed. But will Eastern Europe move toward the modern West, in which ontological hierarchy has been replaced, beginning in the seventeenth century, by a polymorphous political-moral-aesthetic polylogue as the main integrative device? Or will Eastern Europe remain a culturally distinctive region, with another, perhaps more “traditionalist,” ontological hierarchy acquiring hegemony? (pp. 153–154)

Every passage from Kavolis’s books, every piece of his iconoclastic and critical scholarship stands as his silent intellectual and moral autobiography. Kavolis’s theoretical views and insights, methodological preferences and disciplinary choices not only reflect his value orientation, convictions, and individual experience, but also underlines and redefines what is at the core of the civilizational perspective and of the critical study of modern society and culture.

The sociologists who have taken civilizations rather than nation states, world-systems, communities, or interacting individuals, as their units of analysis have all been deeply concerned with contemporary life. Indeed it was through their efforts to explain the distinctive characteristics of contemporary life that they have been led to the comparative study of civilizations. Without it, in their view, contemporary life could not be sufficiently understood. (p. 173)

Not only Kavolis, but also Max Weber, Louis Dumont, Ernest Gellner, S. N. Eisenstadt, and other towering theorists of civilizations subscribed to this point of view. Indeed, the ambition to conceive of the nature of modern life is a major inspiration for the comparative study of civilizations.

So, too, I add, are the discontents of one’s own milieu, and the striving for the critical questioning of one’s own society and culture, in order to reveal where, why and how they failed to embrace the ideals, values, and norms of universal humanity. The search for the intellectual and moral sensibilities capable of discovering the Other is therefore inseparable from the awakening, both in oneself and others, of con-

science and self.

The immense scope of Kavolis's work ranges from such boundary disciplines as sociology of fine arts and cultural psychology to sociological theory, sociology of culture, social theory as a modern critique of society and culture, and civilizational theory as a theoretical framework for a meta-theory of the social sciences. Having said that, I hasten to add that Kavolis, while trying to work out a general theory of the humanities and the social sciences, was never acting as a single-handed generalist interested solely in how to build a sort of disconnected, albeit plausible, theory, say, in civilizational analysis or history of consciousness. Instead, Kavolis did his utmost to link his methodological approaches and analytic perspectives in the social sciences to the humanities. The same applies to Kavolis's effort to establish the relationship between his theoretical and cross-cultural sophistication and the empirical evidence he sought in art history, cultural history, mythology, and history of ideas.

For instance, Kavolis's work in cultural psychology provides a subtle and penetrating analysis of the models of evil as paradigms of secular morality and of the models of rebellion as contrasting modes of cultural logic. In doing so, he offers his insights into the emergence of the myth of Prometheus and that of Satan. Whereas Prometheus emerges in Kavolis's theory of the rise of modernity as a metaphor of technological progress/technologically efficient civilization combined with a kind of sympathetic understanding of, and compassion for, the urges and sufferings of humankind, Satan is interpreted by him as a metaphor of the destruction of legitimate power and of the subversion of the predominant social and moral order.

Hence, some of most provocative and perceptive of Kavolis's hints dropped by him concerning how to analyze the symbolic logic of Marxism and all major social or political revolutions – which aspects here are Promethean, and which Satanic. Each modernity – for Kavolis spoke of numerous and multiple “modernities,” each of them as ancient as civilization itself – or civilization-shaping movement, if pushed to the limit, can betray its Promethean and/or Satanic beginnings.⁴

A valuable implication for literary theory and critique, this standpoint underlined Kavolis's insights into Herman Melville's *Moby Dick* and Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*. With sound reason Kavolis noted that even the title of Shelley's novel, *Frankenstein, or the Modern Prometheus*, was deeply misleading – the obviously Satanic character,

Frankenstein, who challenged the Creator of the universe and of the human being, was misrepresented there as a sort of modern Prometheus.

A scholar capable of employing and revising many theoretical approaches and methodologies, Kavolis worked out, among other things, the phase-cycle theory of artistic creativity, an interesting case of the cyclic theory of culture which deserves honorable mention among other major cyclic theories of history and culture in the twentieth century, such as those of the morphologists of culture – Oswald Spengler, Arnold J. Toynbee, Pitirim A. Sorokin, and A. L. Kroeber.

In his book, *History on Art's Side*, Kavolis analyzed the social and psychohistorical dynamics of artistic creativity. He revealed why and how the outbreak of creative energy and vitality may follow periods of rapid social change or even the economic and political decline of society – a hypothesis that could be richly supported by the historical evidence; suffice it to recall the flowering of literature, theater, and visual arts in post-revolutionary Russia.

In so doing, he shed light on how the economic-action cycles, political-action cycles, ideological-action cycles, and communal-action cycles corresponded to the achievement-motivation cycles and culture-mentality cycles, changing the climate in society and affecting artistic creativity.⁵

Criticism, Tolerance, and Openness: Toward a Postmodern Nationalism

One of the most profound and illuminating of Kavolis's insights into the moral origins of the nationalist critique of nationalism, that is, the social and cultural criticism which occurs within the framework of the nationalist moral culture, reveals a hardly identifiable basis for the politically and morally committed criticism of the twentieth century.

Kavolis's notion of the moral reciprocity between the individual and his or her community, as well as his idea of the mapping of the modern intellectual and modern sensibilities through the individual's imagined community or society or culture, is a logical continuation of his conception of modern individualism.

As an impulse which enables a human individual to differentiate him/herself from the collective and stand for his/her personal faith, individualism has been a potent explosive constantly threatening the rigidity of fossilized dogmas. If the community, before individualism came into existence, was a once-and-for-all structure locking up the human being within itself, today it appears as the process of the

human being's self-examination in history.⁶

While working out a theory of morally committed individualism, Kavolis clearly defines the concept of tolerance, which is a significant part of his liberal social and political philosophy. For Kavolis, tolerance was too important a moral and political phenomenon to be lightly reduced to theoretical curiosity or to what he described in terms of indifference as a symptom of social pathology. Elsewhere he defines indifference as a form of modern barbarity.

As the moral and political commitment to stand for everyone's right to freely decide how to express him/herself and how to be a human individual, tolerance has nothing to do with moral relativism and indifference to ethical issues. It was Kavolis's conscious response to the charges of moral relativism and indifference, the constant and unfounded charges against liberals deeply rooted in twentieth-century Lithuania and, in particular, amongst conservative Lithuanian immigrants in the United States. Kavolis's insights into heroism and humanism as moral stances provide an interpretative framework for tolerance, too:

If the hero is accountable to his consciousness, which represents abstract values, the humanist's conscience assumes the responsibility for flesh-and-blood human beings with whom he or she lives in community. It is not enough to passively tolerate everything around, including dogma, which is always wrong; and blood, even if the blood is of those we do not love; and racist hatred. If tolerance is not a symptom of the pathology of indifference, it should be defined as the commitment to actively stand for everyone's right to have his or her truth and individual existence. It is also the commitment to stand against anybody who wants to control the other's individual existence and penetrate it with the propagandist's fingers, no matter which doctrine the propagandist preaches.⁷

Thus conceived, tolerance may well be translated into the discovery of the Other when studying non-Western societies, cultures, and civilizations.

This is exactly what happened in Kavolis's comparative studies. His crucial idea that all theoretically identifiable civilizations, in addition to their cosmologies and ontological conceptions, have the notions of conscience and self rests on the philosophical assumption that self-discovery occurs only through the discovery of the Other. Tolerance is another name for dialogue.

Tracing Kavolis's conception of tolerance, we can map its crucial

moral and political implications for what he took as the polylogue of civilizations. Such a discursive map would be incomplete without taking into account the discourse about identity, freedom, and nationalism, the latter having been perceived by Kavolis as a symbolic design of modern civilization and as a pattern of consciousness.

The intense polylogue of moral cultures, modes of self-comprehension, critical intellectual discourses, value orientations, political systems, aesthetic sensibilities, theoretical vocabularies, travelogues, and moral biographies, in order to (re)discover and conceive of oneself in the idiom of self-and-civilization – this is how Kavolis imagined what he termed a multicivilizational universe of discourse.

Hence, his ideas of local sensibility and intellectual empathy when dealing with non-Western or peripheral-Western – for instance, East European – symbolic designs and structures of sentiments. Having defined the integrating principle of modern Western civilization as the polymorphous moral-political-aesthetic polylogue, Kavolis asks if Eastern Europe can be expected to come to rely on such a principle.

In doing so, he deeply penetrates the Lithuanian discourse of identity and freedom by recalling the Herderian notion of the nation as the collective individual, still a crucial aspect of the collective identity and political liberty discourse in Central and Eastern Europe. According to Kavolis, in Eastern Europe,

[t]here is more emphasis than in Western Europe or especially the U.S. on the moral reality of historically durable “collective individualities” – nations, religious communities, and so on. (In these respects, as well as in some others, there are similarities with Latin America.) In Eastern Europe, it is not only individuals but also nations that claim “inalienable rights,” the latter with more assurance of the justice of the claim (since the individual, not the nation, cannot be accused, at least by individuals composing it, of selfishness). Desovietization revives a sense of connectedness within natural-historical collectivities.⁸

Being perfectly aware of how deeply the Herderian discourse is grounded in Lithuanian and Central/East European discourse of identity and freedom, Kavolis found himself quite skeptical about the propensity of the authors of general theories of nationalism to view nationalism either with some hostility, as an unpleasant and temporary aberration of modern Europe, or with anticipation of its inexorable demise within the framework of supranational political and legal systems.

Such a myopic standpoint, in Kavolis's opinion, overlooked crucial aspects of nationalism as a civilizational process, let alone the ability of nationalism to shape social reality and consciousness. What is the point in fiercely attacking, demonizing, or otherwise discrediting nationalism, which is just another term for the cultural modernization of Central and Eastern Europe? Kavolis concluded that it would be much wiser to modernize nationalism by opening up its liberal and inclusive traits, instead of conflating the liberal and modernizing nationalism with the blood-and-soil, ethnic-cleansing nationalism.

However, the question remains whether the process of political and cultural emancipation of post-Communist Central and Eastern Europe is in tune with the liberal-democratic sensibilities. Having stressed the importance of the process of desovietization which comes to revive, in Eastern Europe, a sense of connectedness within natural-historical collectivities, Kavolis draws a dividing line between Central Europe and Eastern Europe on the grounds of the presence of what he qualifies as the moral monopolies, a threat to political tolerance and, by and large, to liberal democracy, too:

This goes along with what are at present peculiarly East European consensual pressures, tendencies to reject on moral grounds those who disagree on political or even strategic matters. This deep cultural tendency is somewhat offset by the more superficial current political reputation (as something "Western" and therefore superior) of tolerance. Political tolerance is perhaps strong enough to have a chance at competing with the moral monopolies only in Central Europe from Hungary to Estonia. It is fragile but of growing strength in Russia. The deep tendency toward moral monopolies undermines the possibility of replacing a rules-oriented by a freedom-oriented moral system. (The sole surviving Western European approximation to a society in which a moral monopoly asserts itself somewhat effectively is Ireland.)⁹

Bearing in mind the historically rooted trajectories of consciousness in Central and Eastern Europe, Kavolis worked out a theory of postmodern nationalism perceived as an attempt to reconcile what has been separated by modernity. At the same time, the idea of postmodern nationalism served, for Kavolis, as an interpretative framework for the split between the modernist and the antimodernist. He accorded the concept of the postmodern to the process of desovietization, too:

If desovietization, in its diversity of forms, continues relatively unin-

dered and does not become complacent with its own rhetoric, it has the potentiality of becoming a first-rate (that is, “enriching”) civilizational movement. If the concept of the “postmodern” can still be retrieved from the cultists who have made it a monopoly of their own exuberance, desovietization could even be considered, in some of its cultural emphases, as “postmodern.” (I conceive of the “postmodern” not as antimodernist, but as the building of bridges between the “modernist” and the “antimodernist.”)¹⁰

Here we have the nexus of Kavolis’s intellectual program. Modernity has come to split up the human world. However, the point is to reconcile those provinces of human existence and distant faculties of the human soul that have been separated by modernity. Kavolis seems to have penetrated the core of modernity and its challenge by offering his inclusive theoretical alternative. How to react to the challenge of modernity? How to accept it?

This problematical focus sheds new light on postmodernism as one of the possible responses to the fundamental theoretical alternative and an existential dilemma formulated by Kavolis. He considered postmodernism to be the possible way to reconcile those things that have been taken by modernity as incompatible in principle, rather than as a mere theoretical trend in fashion.

How to reconcile and bridge what have been ruthlessly separated by modernity: truth and value; rationality and emotional intimacy; expertise and sensitivity; hierarchy and equality/individualism; tradition and innovation; the classic canon and the released creative experiment; metaphysics and phenomenalist science; a particular individual and community; a particular community and universal humanity?

One of the possible ways would be to suggest a return to metaphysics and religion (or the traditional concept of transcendence, to use Kavolis’s term)—the phenomena that have been, from the point of view of the split between truth and value, neutralized, relativized and, consequently, placed by modernity on the margin of consciousness and existence.

Another way, suggested by the sequence and logic of Kavolis’s thought and by his ambitious epistemological program for the social sciences and the humanities, would be an attempt at analytically embracing and, by attaching the dimensions of value and meaning, encompassing the totality of human experience, through the comparative study of civilizations. The latter implies the analysis of the flux of symbolic meaning and of the change of the structures of consciousness

over time in Western and non-Western civilizations, by capitalizing on the civilization analysis and the history of consciousness.

Small wonder, then, that Kavolis, in his article "Nationalism, Modernization, and the Polylogue of Civilizations," defines nationalism in the following way:

Nationalism is a conception of the cultural identity of a nation which becomes a mobilizing political program even when the nation is (as to some extent it always is) in the process of being invented. National identity is what, unless it is either culturally put into question or politically endangered, does not need to be explicitly declared about one's sense of being more at home in one this-worldly community of participation and historical experience than in any other. The close alignment of culture with politics is perhaps the most general source of the dangers which nationalism has presented not only to the world, but to the members of the nations it sought to represent, to revive, or to "build." This alignment gives to nationalism a deeper, quasi-religious kind of power, an ability to overwhelm, which "normal" political forces generally lack. It leads to the exploitation of culture by politics.¹¹

In his short, sharp, and precise formulations regarding the symbolic codes and the structures of meaning within nationalism, Kavolis reveals what other theories of nationalism are missing. Not only does Kavolis show the modernizing and liberal potential of nationalism, at the same time clearly pointing out its dubious and dangerous points that largely depend on the political, historical, and cultural context within which a given nation or community builds or revives itself; he also shows the similarity between nationalism and other civilization-shaping movements, from romanticism to feminism.

Kavolis succeeded where other students of nationalism failed. From the point of view of the link between theoretical sophistication and empirical evidence in viewing nationalism as a major civilization-shaping force, Kavolis far surpasses other theorists of nationalism.

Democracy in particular benefits from loosening the connections between culture and politics, so that important symbolic quests cannot be monopolized by particular political forces. Like religion, national identity operates optimally in a democratic setting when its distinguishing marks are distributed over a range of political organizations and over a series of cultural programs, the two distributions far from coinciding with each other, and not divided rigorously along the lines of "majority" and "minority" groups. In what follows we

will be mainly concerned with nationalisms as conceptions of collective identity – in their cultural rather than political aspect. In its cultural form, nationalism is similar to other civilization-shaping movements of the last two centuries – from romanticism to feminism – in that it relates to all levels of modernization of culture. In nineteenth-century Germany and Eastern Europe and the present-day Near East, nationalism tends toward the archaic. American nationalism and, to a lesser extent, mainstream French nationalism since the Revolution have been modernizing. The crucial issue in distinguishing modernizing from archaic nationalism is whether one derives society from individuals having “human rights” or perceives individuals as embodiments of the “collective soul” of the nation.¹²

In his thorough analysis of the four types of nationalism (archaic, modernizing, antimodernistic, and postmodern), Kavolis describes Central and Eastern Europe as a laboratory of the diverse trajectories of the “modernization of nationalisms.” “In Central Europe, Hungarian nationalism has probably changed most since 1939, toward the modernistic model, Yugoslav nationalisms have changed least” (p. 135). The incisiveness of Kavolis’s analysis is striking—in his analytical study written in 1991, Kavolis predicted the Yugoslav tragedy.

Interestingly enough, the difference between conservative nationalism and liberal nationalism is still overlooked by the current social sciences and critical scholarship in general. As noted, liberal nationalism allows room for cosmopolitan stances and multiculturalism in politics and public discourse, as well as the modernizing critique of politics and culture it employs.

However insightful, the authors of general theories of nationalism – in particular, Ernest Gellner, Eric Hobsbawm, Anthony Smith, and Benedict Anderson – failed to take into account the importance of national cultures for the political and institutional settings for liberal democracy and the enormous modernizing potential of Central/East European nationalism.

Finally, they overlooked the ethic of liberal nationalism and its implications for public discourse and social criticism. The merits of liberal nationalism in disclosing totalitarianism are too obvious to need emphasis. It suffices to recall Czeslaw Milosz, Vaclav Havel, Milan Kundera, Tomas Venclova, and other eminent Central European critics of totalitarianism, ideocracy, xenophobia, and manipulative exchanges.

Of Gellner and Hobsbawm, Kavolis wrote:

The general theories of nationalism... fail to take into account the

importance of national cultures in producing different kinds, or symbolic designs, of nationalism. This has the unjustifiable practical consequence that all nationalisms are treated alike – usually, by most social scientists, either with some hostility or with anticipations of their demise (p. 142).

It makes sense to stress the emergence of what might be described as postmodern nationalism, which, according to Kavolis, “would allow for and recognize the human quality of *openness* and the cultural characteristic of translucence... – a Milosz-like commitment to one’s own nation permeated with a responsiveness to others, a sense of multiple, communicating identities” [p. 136].

Kavolis identifies a postmodern nationalism in some leading figures of political dissent and emancipation in Central and Eastern Europe. He suggests that anticipations of postmodern nationalism could be found as early as in Giuseppe Mazzini.

In bridging the modernist and the antimodernist/the archaizing longings, postmodern nationalism would also serve as a framework for the polylogue of civilizations. Not in vain, Kavolis notes that “postmodern nationalism conceives society as a non-exclusive, open-frontiers, polyphonic, ‘multicultural’ co-operation integrated by a shared sense of adequacy, an *Angemessenheit*” [p. 136].

Defining postmodern nationalism and rethinking civilization-shaping processes in Central and Eastern Europe, Kavolis was not only describing his future vision of Lithuania. In so doing, he was also finishing his moral autobiography. The concept of postmodern nationalism, as well as the idea of postmodernism as the bridge over the gap between modernistic and antimodernistic aspects of human existence, sheds new light on why and how Kavolis arrived at the comparative study of civilizations.

It is necessary to do the following:

- To stand for every single aspect of human diversity, identity, and freedom;
- To realize that without you and your community of memory and participation humanity would be incomplete;
- To bridge your individual existence with societal life of those who, however self-centered and insensitive, need your voice the most;
- To identify and fight every trace of moral blindness and insensitivity in your community as passionately and uncompromis-

ingly as if it were your own vice;

- And to be attentive to everything that is happening in the world, for neglect, complacency, and contempt are nothing less than moral provincialism.

The Scholarship of the 21st Century

The endnotes of Kavolis's immensely rich, theoretically thick, and compact texts were full of metaphors, metonymies, anticlimaxes, antitheses, paradoxes, and other tropes or figures of speech. Analytically accurate, precise, and incisive formulations of Kavolis's thought in the body of the text were accompanied by numerous footnote allusions, elliptic phrases, short comparisons, critical notes, and erudite references to various episodes from the lives and moral choices of theorists, politicians, writers, and artists. Each of them could have been developed into a separate study.

The same might be said about Kavolis's working hypotheses and definitions of terms – each of them invited a reconsideration of the theoretical perspectives in which those issues and phenomena were and still are most frequently viewed. Every statement, definition, or hypothesis, in Kavolis's contributions, might have been developed into a monograph. His collage-like insights, maxims, ironic notes, and allusions stand as silent promises of something new to appear in the forthcoming writings. At the same time, they stand as invitation to the universe of dialogue.

A deliberately unfinished work of art has its metaphysics and aesthetics, and so does an unfinished and open-ended thought. Kavolis's maxims and notes may well be compared with the tip of the iceberg beneath which lay the massive foundations of his multidimensional and sophisticated theoretical thought. A major contributor to new methodologies and perspectives in the social sciences and humanities, Kavolis came to provide not only a new theoretical vocabulary, but also an interpretative framework for the most elusive, though dramatic and even tragic, aspects of human experience and existence. In so doing, Kavolis was not only writing his diary and moral autobiography, but also mapping his culture and imagined community of memory and participation.

He greatly contributed to the creating of a new kind of scholarship, the scholarship of the twenty-first century – not bureaucratically “rationalizing” and dividing the human world and social reality, not dogmatically rigid and unreflective, not soulless and totally insensitive about its social effects or political and moral implications, but reflec-

tive, ironic, critical, attentive to every single detail of human existence, and perfectly aware of the vulnerability and fragility of the human world.

It is a scholarship that comes to bridge not only the social science and humanities disciplines, but also the distinct modes of discourse and of self-comprehension. Such a social science with a human face was among the main ambitions of Kavolis. And this is Kavolis's legacy of the polylogue of civilizations.

Notes

1. For more on modern concepts of civilization, see Vytautas Kavolis, *Civilization Analysis as a Sociology of Culture* (Lewiston, N.Y.: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1995); Roger W. Wescott, *Comparing Civilizations: An Unconsensual View* (Atherton, CA: Atherton Press, 2000); Leonidas Donskis, *The End of Ideology and Utopia? Moral Imagination and Cultural Criticism in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Peter Lang, 2000); and Leonidas Donskis, *Forms of Hatred: The Troubled Imagination in Modern Philosophy and Literature* (Amsterdam & New York: Rodopi, 2003).
2. Kavolis, *Civilization Analysis as a Sociology of Culture*, pp. 19–20.
3. For more on Kavolis's bibliography, see Leonidas Donskis, *Identity and Freedom: Mapping Nationalism and Social Criticism in Twentieth-Century Lithuania* (London & New York: Routledge, 2002), pp. 71; 167.
4. For more on this issue, see Vytautas Kavolis, "Civilizational Models of Evil," in Marie Coleman Nelson and Michael Eigen, eds. *Evil: Self and Culture* (New York: Human Sciences Press, 1984), pp. 17–35; Vytautas Kavolis, "Logics of Evil as Secular Moralities," *Soundings*, 68 (Summer 1985), pp. 189–211; Vytautas Kavolis, "Moral Cultures and Moral Logics," *Sociological Analysis*, 38 (Winter 1977), pp. 331–344; and Vytautas Kavolis, *Moralizing Cultures* (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 1993).
5. For more on this issue, see Vytautas Kavolis, *History on Art's Side: Social Dynamics in Artistic Efflorescences* (Ithaca, N.Y., and London: Cornell University Press, 1972). For more on art style as a projection of religious qualities, and also on how the images of the universe, along with religion and politics, affect

the styles of art, see Vytautas Kavolis, *Artistic Expression – A Sociological Analysis* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1968).

6. Vytautas Kavolis, “Ir erezija, ir humanizmas” [Both Heresy and Humanism], in Virginijus Gasiliunas, ed., *Metmenu laisvieji svarstymai: 1959–1989* [Free Debates of *Metmenys*, 1959–1989] (Vilnius: Lietuvos rasytoju sąjungos leidykla, 1993), p. 44.
7. *Ibid.*, pp. 51–52.
8. Kavolis, *Civilization Analysis as a Sociology of Culture*, p. 161.
9. *Ibid.*
10. *Ibid.*, p. 166.
11. Vytautas Kavolis, “Nationalism, Modernization, and the Polylogue of Civilizations,” *Comparative Civilizations Review*, 25 (1991), p. 134.
12. *Ibid.*, pp. 134–135.