Poland in America's Crooked Mirror:
An Installment in Culture Wars[1]

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For several hundred years now secular utopians have been bludgeoning traditional foundations of the Western civilization. Lately, the "progressives" have focused on Poland as a substitute target for a larger assault on traditional American values. They have blamed Poland for anti-Semitism, including an alleged complicity in the Holocaust. This has largely succeeded because the secularists command the symbols and the language of America's discourse. Since the sixties, they have constructed America's new cultural framework. It is in this light that we shall consider the works of Jan Tomasz Gross, on the one hand, and of George Weigel, on the other.

1. Preaching to the choir

An intellectual argument congruent with the dominant cultural paradigm tends to influence best. It taps into the subconscious of the elite and the people. Essentially, it endows their unspoken convictions, hopes, fears, and prejudices, with a framework and a vernacular. When, in the wake of the First World War, Oswald Spengler published his gloomy *The Decline of the West* it was masochistically absorbed by the shell-shocked, trench warfare survivors of Europe's battlefields. T.S. Eliot's *cri de coeur* in *The Waste Land* reflexively evoked similar emotions among its readers. Jose Ortega y Gasset simply dotted the "i" when his *Revolt of the Masses* described how the barbarians trampled the public space vacated by the flower of the old elite slaughtered between 1914 and 1918. Thus, for Western intelligentsia, the war served as a cataclysmic prism conditioning a nearly uniform response to cultural, political, and social commentary born in its wake.

The post-war malaise, however, was propelled by a much greater force than just the immediate memories of the slaughter. The bloody conflict merely ignited layers of self-resentment and self-doubt that had been lingering for about a century and a half in Europe. The annihilative conjuncture of the Great War itself and its post-traumatic aftermath tapped into the lethal affliction of the Enlightenment: the loss of Faith. At first, it was just apostasy, plain and simple, and its aim was the Catholic Church. Soon, other Christian denominations came under fire, then, any religion, all and sundry. But arguably the most brutal onslaught has continued against what we call in America the "Judeo-Christian tradition."

The Enlightenment promised to substitute Faith with Reason, allegedly the only true Virtue of the West. Reason became Faith for many. When the culture of Reason as ideology led to the world-wide slaughter, some, including members of the elite, embraced the proposition that Reason failed and thus lost faith in it. Rather than re-embracing and reconciling Reason and Faith, the progressive intellectuals rejected both. Instead, they embarked upon a quest of faith for a secular utopia, while retaining the empirical veneer of reason to legitimize their rhetoric. This would make them palatable and respectable for most people who had some grounding in the Western tradition of Faith and Reason. This would allow the progressives to continue to shape the dominant cultural paradigm and to unveil a succession of brave new alternatives to the allegedly rotten, hateful, warmongering, racist, homophobic, sexist, and discredited Western society.

Thus, the nefarious seed planted in the 18th century came to haunt the West after 1918. And it is well and alive today, even more than at any other time in history. It reveals itself anytime the intellectual pundits of the left present to us their utopia or counter-utopia *du jour*.

2. The Utopia Revealed and the Conservative Predicament

When Margaret Mead wanted to promote the cause of the sexual revolution in the United States, she deployed her credentials as an anthropologist to conjure up a Never, Neverland. Samoa became her

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alleged island paradise in the Pacific. By worshipping "The Other," Mead skewered American society. Masquerading as a scholarly monograph, *Coming of Age in Samoa* (1928) was a blatant attack on America's Christianity, tradition, and patriotism. The author was a virulent enemy of Western morality, endeavoring to wean the American elite from it by brazen advocacy of cultural relativism.

Mead's Boazian approach was in vogue at the time. Britain's celebrated leftist couple Sidney and Beatrice Webb likewise sang paeans to their favorite utopia of "social justice": The Soviet Union. Countless other fellow travelers and agents of influence shamelessly emulated them in the West. They conned legions of otherwise decent men and women into embracing Comintern propaganda as the truth revealed.

A few conservatives understood from the very beginning that such writers were less interested in describing the subjects of their admiration than in besmirching the object of their hatred: The United States of America. Paul Hollander has even argued that the radical leftists tend to blame their own psychological inadequacies and disappointed dreams on the US: America has failed to live up to their ideal, so America must pay. Thus, leftist utopia realizes itself through the destruction of the cultural, social, economic, and political order of the United States. Undermining tradition is indispensable to hijacking the hearts and minds of the elite and the people. Since successful propaganda needs also a positive twist, the USSR, and later China, Cuba, Vietnam, and Nicaragua radiantly fit the bill.

That much is clear. But what to do? Precious few conservatives however had the specialized knowledge to debunk the seductive myths about the Soviet Union or Samoa. Thus, the conservatives were hard pressed to beat the liberals on their own turf and with their own weapons. Further, for a long time the scholarly ammunition against leftist punditry was lacking because true scholars hated to debase their scholarship to debunk propaganda. Others were reluctant to challenge the holy writ of liberalism.

For example, Mead's malignant doctoral thesis took about half a year to be written, published, and popularized in 1928. It sold millions. Virtually no anthropologist dared to question her revelations until 1979 when her erstwhile admirer, Derek Freeman, commenced field work on Samoa and, to his great chagrin, discovered the truth. And it took Freeman twenty years to research and publish his definitive critique of Mead's bi-sexual fantasies. For his relentless pursuit of the truth, Freeman remains the *betê noire* of mainstream anthropology, which continues to be dominated by the secularist liberals.

3. The Scholarly Method

While some intellectuals are more than willing to suspend the scholarly method to achieve political ends, their propaganda, ironically, works to the detriment of "The Other." Unexplored and misunderstood, the iconic "Other" usually becomes an object of politically correct worship. A good scholar, however, is able to assess foreign culture on its own terms. Further, as a comparativist, he should be able to discern whether its elements are analogous with various manifestations of American civilization. Such analogies can be then explicated through the prism of compatibility with our own native phenomena. This rigorous process of cultural translation allows us eventually to embrace, or reject, foreign forms depending on their esthetic, cultural, or ideological compatibility with our own values.

As mentioned, few American conservatives bother to study foreign cultures. But those who do are usually superbly attuned in their endeavors. Take, for example, the attention devoted by some conservatives to one not entirely likely candidate, Poland. Russell Kirk, for one, studied and came to love the epic poem *Sir Thaddeus* by the great Polish romantic Adam Mickiewicz. The American appreciated the Pole for the latter's paeans to tradition. In Mickiewicz, Kirk astutely sensed the endearing echoes of Sir Walter Scott and James Fenimore Cooper. Although not a specialist on Poland, the sage of Mecosta could always detect universalism when he saw it and apply it to the American condition. The same is true of George Weigel, who knows Poland intimately.

4. Weigel's Poland

Weigel routinely communes with Polish intellectuals. Having visited there numerous times, the American thinker even runs a summer program for American youth in the late Pope John Paul II's beloved Cracow. He is well equipped to tackle the Polish nation and its culture.

Accordingly, in his *Cube and the Cathedral: Europe, America, and Politics without God*, Weigel singles out Poland's Christian faith, tradition, and patriotism as remedies for the Old Continent's cultural malaise. Like the United States, Poland has them aplenty. And that is what makes her like the US.

Weigel has demonstrated that the Poles often react congruently with what we would recognize as "the American way." Take the Peace of Westphalia, for example. In 1648 the European powers agreed to terminate wars of religion, which had raged for nearly a century and a half. The continent was divided according to the rule of *cuius regio, eius religio*. Henceforth, the ruler would impose his religion on the people and the state would enforce it. Mainstream scholars incredibly hail this projection of the ruler's power over the conscience of his subjects as "a victory for reason over passion."

According to Weigel, however, "In Poland, where there were no wars of religion and where religious tolerance was generally practiced during the Reformation and Counter-Reformation, the Peace of Westphalia is typically viewed as the first moment in European history in which the power of the modern state was used to coerce consciences – and thus the first step along the road to the totalitarianisms under which Poland suffered so grievously during the twentieth century" (pp. 184-85). Doesn't this sound familiar? This sensible sentiment is perfectly in tune with what we view as traditionally American suspicion of the overweening power of the state.

Weigel identifies this eminently American-like analysis of the European reality as "the Slavic view of history." It is based on "the conviction that the deepest currents of history are spiritual and cultural, rather than political and economic" (p. 30). The purveyors of such a view of history have been intellectuals as disparate as Vladimir Soloviev, Václav Havel, Karol Wojtyła (John Paul II), and, in particular, the Polish Romantics, including Adam Mickiewicz. Weigel notes that "The Poles insisted that genuine revolution meant the recovery of lost spiritual and moral values" (p. 30). They believed that "history is driven, over the long haul, by culture – by what men and women honor, cherish, and worship" (p. 30). "Poland is one embodiment of this way of thinking." One might add that traditional America is another.

For an American this sounds familiar not only because of everyday practice but also because of our intellectual tradition. As Weigel succinctly explains, "to call this a 'Slavic view of history' reflects the principal location of this body of thought over the past two hundred years or so. In fact, though, it is really a classically Christian way of thinking about history, whose roots can be traced back at least as far as St. Augustine and *The City of God*. In the English-speaking world of the twentieth century, the most distinguished exponent of this culture-driven view of history was Christopher Dawson" (p. 32) and, we might add, Russell Kirk.

The "Slavic view of history" amounted for a worldview and a culture that helped the Poles weather the complete destruction of their state (1795-1918) by Russia, Prussia, and Austria, and, later, after a brief interlude, its occupation and attempted destruction by the Nazis and Communists (1939-1990). According to Weigel, "Poland survived – better, prevailed – because of culture: a culture formed by a distinctive language….; by a unique literature, which helped keep alive the memory and idea of 'Poland'; and by the intensity of its Catholic faith" (pp. 31-32).

Weigel has noted that the Polish attitude stands in contradistinction to the radical *Weltanschauung* of the Revolution in France of 1789 which preached the absolute discontinuity between the past and the present. That is why Western leftists consider traditional Poland the farthest thing from Mead's Samoa: indeed a veritable anti-utopia. She is out of favor with them also because Poland is so much like traditional America. Accordingly, they apply to Poland the terms of endearment otherwise reserved for the USA, freely accusing her of homophobia, bigotry, racism, sexism, and anti-Semitism.

5. Anti-Semitism

The last charge in particular sticks. True, there was anti-Semitism in Poland before, during, and after the Second World War. However, there was also anti-Semitism in Germany, the Soviet Union, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Romania, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, Greece, Italy, France, Holland, Belgium, Denmark, Sweden, Norway, Iceland, Portugal, Spain, Great Britain, and elsewhere around the world. There was even anti-Semitism in the United States. Bill Buckley has admitted that what passed for casual, dinner-time conversation at his home over half a century ago would make him recoil and leave the table in disgust today.

The Holocaust made all the difference, Buckley said. But it took decades of patient researching, publishing, and educating before the Holocaust made, first, a dent, and, then, serious inroads in the West's collective conscience, finally becoming the ultimate moral yardstick to judge an individual, a community, or a nation.

Naturally, the anti-Jewish prejudice bandied about the table at the Buckleys was not of an exterminationist kind like in Nazi Germany. It was Christian conservative anti-Semitism, according to the typology advocated by liberal scholar Peter Pulzer. The same type of unwarranted bias characterized anti-Jewish prejudice in Poland before, during, and after the Second World War. One significant difference was that Poland, unlike Western European countries (which now have their Muslim "problem" to contend with), had a large, unassimilated Jewish minority – a veritable nation within a nation. However, such fine distinctions are lost on pundits who like to opine about "the Poles." Some of these observers use, disturbingly, the *reductio ad Hitlerum* approach. American conservatives have been acutely aware of this besmirching trick since at least the Goldwater presidential campaign in 1964. But few people know enough to recognize when the same type of calumny is applied to Poland. Its latest manifestation is the work of Jan Tomasz Gross, a Princeton professor.

6. *Fear*

In his latest book, *Fear: Anti-Semitism in Poland after Auschwitz*, Gross purports to describe Jewish-Polish conflict in the wake of the Second World War. He praises Stalinist intellectuals and their liberal collaborators in Poland as allegedly the sole paradigms of virtue. He then concentrates his ire on everyone else: the traditional, Christian, and anti-Communist elite; the Catholic Church; the anti-Nazi and anti-Communist underground; the Free Polish Army in Exile; boy scouts; and, generally, the Polish people *en bloc*, the farmers and the factory workers in particular. Gross claims that they were all fraught with anti-Semitism whose sources were Christian faith, tradition, and patriotism. All that constitutes traditional Poland, according to Gross, is tainted and it needs to be urgently discarded. He and his fellow leftist intellectuals will gladly supply a blueprint for radical change.

The deconstructionist inspiration for Gross's argument is quite apparent. Every decent, traditionalist, Christian, and patriotic American is likewise held responsible for slavery, racism, anti-Semitism, segregation, lynchings, ghettos, and all other injustices, real and imagined, in the nation's history. There were naturally ugly sins in America's history, including racism, but they were gross perversions of the American ethos and not its fundamental mainstay. Does it follow that we must reject the American legacy wholesale? After all, the American project remains successful precisely because it never ceases to work toward realizing the prescriptions of its Founding Fathers.

Similarly, there were sins in Poland's past, including some anti-Jewish animus. Does it mean that the very nation that welcomed the Jews after their expulsion from Western Europe and which lived peacefully with them for five centuries should cut itself off from its Christian faith, tradition, and patriotism? After all, George Weigel has plainly demonstrated that Poland's faith, tradition, and patriotism allowed the Poles to resist totalitarianism successfully, including during the "Solidarity" insurrection of the 1980s. Weigel argues that

> what made Solidarity work… was that millions of people, many of them non-Christians, committed themselves to living Christian values: the honesty that stood in sharp counterpoise to communism's lies about everything; the courage that faced up to communist brutality; the fraternity that resisted communism's attempts to divide and rule. Solidarity created a kind of new, or renewed, culture; that culture produced a new kind of resistance politics…. The Solidarity revolution was a moment when Europeans – first Poles, then others in east central Europe, then still others throughout the Continent – discovered that they weren't alone: that a 'we' existed, a 'we' that was capable of spiritual, moral, and political renewal. That European 'we' lived an experience of solidarity in Solidarity, and the European 'we' which lived that experience lived it in solidarity with American friends and allies (p. 129).

And that is how, in brief, Communism was vanquished. Weigel also sees a redemptive utility of the Polish way for the future of Europe: "And here is one possibility for the reconversion of Europe, its rediscovery of its spiritual roots, and the consequent strengthening of its democratic political culture: the religiously more intense societies of east central Europe, with living memories of religiously shaped democratic political change, may, as new members of the European Union, reignite a 'new evangelization' (as Pope John Paul II has termed it) in the older democracies of post-Christian western Europe" (pp. 149-150).

Once again: should the Poles cut themselves off from this legacy? Gross seems to think so. To give credence to his radical postulates, the radical propagandist drapes himself in the garb of a scholar, just like Margaret Mead.

7. A Flawed Narrative

To make his own prejudices palatable, Gross spins the following gruesome tale. During the Second World War "the Poles" assisted the Nazis in the murder of the Jews. In the process, "the Poles" robbed their property and appropriated their work places. After the war, to avoid the consequences of their crimes, they reacted with hostility to the Jewish survivors miraculously saved from the Holocaust. At best, "the Poles" chased the Jews away. At worst, they killed them: individually and collectively, including during the notorious Kielce pogrom of July 1946, which was allegedly an entirely spontaneous affair. "The Poles" are pathological anti-Semites.

A handful of quotes should amply illustrate the point. As Gross himself put it, "I believe, of a comprehensively documented story: it was widespread collusion in the Nazi-driven plunder, spoliation, and eventual murder of the Jews that generated Polish anti-Semitism after the war" (p. xiv). Further, "mass-scale involvement of Poles from all walks of life in a murderous assault on their Jewish fellow citizens one year after the war" occurred (p. 163). According to Gross, "I see no other plausible explanation of the virulent postwar anti-Semitism in Poland but that it was embedded in the society's opportunistic wartime behavior. Jews were perceived as a threat to the material status quo, security, and peaceful conscience of their Christian fellow citizens after the war because they had been plundered and because what remained of Jewish property, as well as Jews' social roles, had been assumed by Polish neighbors in tacit and often directly opportunistic complicity with Nazi-instigated institutional mass murder" (p. 247). Once again, "broad strata of Polish society took advantage of Nazi policies and joined in the spoliation of their Jewish neighbors" (p. 260). Why? "Simply put, socialization into anti-Semitic ideology by the most numerous prewar political parties and the Catholic church, in addition to the demoralization of wartime, combined with the existence of a broad stratum of beneficiaries in Poland who for economic reason resented and actively opposed the return of Jews to their towns and villages after the war" (p. 46).

Why were the Jews targeted? For two reasons: economic and psychological. On the one hand, "in consequence of anti-Jewish measures and the mass killings of Jews, a broad stratum of Polish society filled the resulting vacuum and experienced upward mobility. This large group of beneficiaries, whose material circumstances and prospects improved significantly in the process, had no intention of giving back their newly acquired property and jobs" (p. 178). On the other hand, "Jewish survivors were an unbearable sore spot *because they had been victimized* by their Polish neighbors – for centuries, but especially during the Nazi occupation. The wartime historical record, its postwar social consequences,

and the findings of experimental psychology all bear this out: people have a propensity to hate those whom they have injured [emphasis in the original]" (p. 164).

Next, "That Jews were being murdered did not seem to shock many people in Poland in 1946. It was accepted matter-of-factly by individuals from many walks of life, including those who did not, and probably would not, lend a helping hand to any such endeavors. What foundation of moral economy is necessary to admit such a possibility of a course of normal events?" (p. 111). The failure was that of Christianity, Gross argues, in particular of the Catholic Church: "This is a history book, not a moral tale, but since the Catholic church's business is with the Ten Commandments, one can evaluate the deeds of its functionaries in the light of moral criteria without being inappropriately judgmental. It behooves us to note that… the institutional elite of the Catholic church chose to completely ignore postwar anti-Semitism in Poland…. The hierarchy of Poland's Catholic church abdicated its responsibility to offer spiritual guidance and simply coasted along…. The symbolism of officials 'washing their hands' while innocent Jews were tormented to death was lost on this Catholic clergy, blinded by prejudice" (p. 152-153). Last but not least, "in each district where the voice of its representatives was not heard on this issue, the Church became complicitous in murderous assaults by Polish Catholics against their Jewish neighbors" (p. 261).

To debunk such myths would require a truckload of scholarly monographs. So far the present author has written several, which thoroughly discredit Gross and his ilk and their "methodology", including *After the Holocaust: Jewish-Polish Conflict in the Wake of World War II* (2003); *Between Nazis and Soviets: Occupation Politics in Poland, 1939-1947* (2004); and *The Massacre in Jedwabne, July 10, 1941: Before, During, and After* (2005).

Briefly, during the Second World War, many Poles were victims of the Nazis and Soviets. Up to 3 million of Polish Christians perished. Of all the countries under complete Nazi occupation, Poland was the only one that did not form a Quisling (collaborationist) government. A few Poles collaborated with the Nazis in the extermination of the Jews. Many more rescued Jews. The majority remained passive, in the face of a death penalty for helping Jews, observing the unfolding mass murder with compassion, indifference, or approval. Meanwhile, the Germans confiscated all Jewish property. Some Poles scavenged the abandoned property, which would have been hauled away or claimed by the Third Reich anyway. Other Poles rented and a few even bought expropriated Jewish properties from the occupiers. After the war, some continued renting the confiscated Jewish property from the Communists; and others even bought the properties from surviving Jews. A few Poles killed Jewish survivors who returned to reclaim their properties. As for anti-Jewish violence, it had a variety of causes. For example, the prominence of the involvement of the Communist secret police, uniformed militia, auxiliary militia, and military in the notorious Kielce pogrom casts serious doubt about the "spontaneity" of this anti-Jewish assault. Even Jan Tomasz Gross admitted elsewhere that "anti-Semitism was skillfully used to provoke pogroms intended to compromise anti-Communist opposition in the eyes of the Western opinion" (Gross in Norman Naimark and Leonid Gibianskii, eds., *The Establishment of Communist Regimes in Eastern Europe* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1997), 34).

Overall, however, Jewish-Polish conflict following World War II can be ascribed to several reasons. As I argue in *After the Holocaust*,

> It is unwarranted to attribute Jewish deaths *a priori* to anti-Semitism. It is logically fallacious and historically inaccurate to attribute automatically any violent death of a Jewish person occurring after the Holocaust in Poland to Polish anti-Semitism. It is also incorrect to postulate a continuum between the Holocaust and the events in Poland after the entry of the Red Army in the summer of 1944.
>
> Instead, we have discerned another set of causes altogether for anti-Jewish violence. A convergence of only partly related but simultaneous actions by Jewish Communists to support Stalin and to strike at the Polish independentists, by Jewish avengers to punish real and alleged perpetrators of crimes against Jews during the Nazi occupation, and by the majority of the Jewish community to reclaim their property, caused a variety of adverse Polish reactions. Some of them

> resulted in violence against Jews. The Jewish side tended to regard these Polish reactions as uniformly stemming from anti-Semitism. The Poles considered Jewish actions as proof of Jewish collusion with the Communists (pp. 221-222).

Now, it is virtually impossible to expect the American intelligentsia to treat the Grossian paradigm equally with its empirical alternative. The former is firmly embedded in America's subconscious. It perfectly tallies with the American consensus about "Polish anti-Semitism." However, to comprehend America's "knowledge" about Polish-Jewish relations, we should temporarily lay aside *Fear* and fearlessly inquire into the current cultural framework in the United States.

8. America's Cultural Context and Poland's Absence

Gross's vision is not innovative. On the contrary, it is solidly grounded in Western consciousness. This has to do with the author's methodology and the legacy of the Cold War in the West.

The Cold War limited one's access to the archives behind the Iron Curtain. Further, cultural prejudice prompts many in the West to accept increasingly the idea that "Polish anti-Semitism" was one of the sources of the Holocaust. In hundreds of so-called memorial books (*yizkor bukher*) one can find stories about denying Jews government employment and access to higher education, the boycott of Jewish businesses, pogroms, and, during the war, the widespread pilfering of Jewish property and killing of Jews. Similar opinions are ubiquitous in thousands – but certainly not all – of Jewish memoirs. In the West the memorial books and memoirs serve as basic sources to research Jewish history, the Holocaust in particular. Hardly anyone crosschecks them against other evidence. This is partly out of deference for the victims of Nazi genocide and partly by default: until recently practically nothing else was available, in particular from the Polish side.

Between 1944 and 1989 Poland was held in Communist captivity. This resulted in the inability of the Poles to defend their version of history in the West. Polish Communists represented the interests of Moscow and they hardly cared about a proper image of the nation they ruled dictatorially. Censorship and police terror not only precluded freedom of discussion in Warsaw but also effectively silenced the Polish diaspora, including numerous Polish-Americans, who were reluctant, in any event, to take up such topics in a less than hospitable atmosphere. For example, any polemics with Jewish memorial books and memoirs in particular would require revealing the names and details of various contentious events that took place in Poland. But, since, more often than not, these details were connected to anti-Communist activities, that would endanger individuals remaining in Poland which remained under the Soviet occupation.

A case in point are the charges leveled by Yaffa Eliach regarding a "post-liberation" pogrom allegedly perpetrated by the Home Army in the town of Ejszyszki. Since these allegations came out in the 1990s, and not earlier, Polish scholars were able to access Soviet and Polish archives as well as recent scholarship on the Polish underground to refute the American historian's claims. This was no pogrom, but rather an anti-Soviet assault by the underground in the course of which a few Jews died mostly as innocent by-standers (see my book on *Ejszyszki: The Background of Events in Ejszyszki and Epilogue of Polish-Jewish Relations in the Eastern Borderlands, 1944-45* (2003), which won Poland's Józef Mackiewicz Literary Award). Unfortunately, and quite typically, unlike the charges, the refutation received no publicity in the American media. An enormous, and growing, disparity has developed between the magnitude of resources and scholarship dealing with the Jewish versus the Polish Christian perspectives.

9. The Jewish Accomplishments

While Communist censorship gagged Poland, Polish Jews and their descendants in Israel, the United States, and elsewhere in the free world were free to propagate their version of memory. It can be found in numerous publications, TV shows, and movies. Scholarships were established; chairs in Jewish history and centers for Jewish studies were endowed; museums were opened, including, most notably, the US Holocaust Memorial Museum.

Initially, aside from a portion of the Jewish community, for the first two decades after the war, hardly anyone cared about the Holocaust. This attitude changed sometimes in the early 1960s. First, probably in the wake of the Nazi war criminal Adolf Eichmann's trail, the framers of the Israeli school curriculum began paying closer attention to the history of the extermination of the Jews during the Second World War. Then, the Jewish diaspora throughout the Western world, in the US in particular, began lobbying federal, state, and local authorities to have the Holocaust included in the educational offerings of their nations. Last but not least, the intellectual context changed. A cultural revolution broke out in the 1960s in the West. The minority voice, "The Other", began to be increasingly heard in historical scholarship. This also concerned the field of Holocaust studies, which has mushroomed into a massive, practically autonomous enterprise.

10. Methodology and the Cultural Revolution

Originally, Holocaust studies followed other scholarly undertakings of a similar nature. Scholars gathered, analyzed, and verified documents in congruence with Aristotelian logic, which used to be the mainstay of Western thought. Raul Hilberg, the pioneer of Holocaust studies in the United States, authored the first comprehensive monograph on the extermination of the Jews, consistently stressing the necessity to treat documentary evidence rigorously. He warned about excessive reliance on on oral accounts, memoirs, and recollections. But Hilberg belonged to the old school. His method, along with the entire legacy of Western scholarship, found itself under fire from the cultural revolutionaries of the 1960s.

The revolutionaries propagated the introduction of an eclectic methodology of historical analysis. This was to help one to learn better about the past. Theory substituted for research. A peculiar dogma developed that held that there were no dogmas. Psychoanalysis was deployed, particularly the "recovered memories" approach. New rules were set up which completely contradicted the logocentric tradition of the West. Thus, the revolutionaries challenged the search for the truth, logic, and rationality as the paradigm for historical research. To participate in the intellectual discourse in the West one had to subordinate oneself to the new, post-modernist paradigm. That paradigm is uneasy, if not outright hostile, toward religion. It is suspicious of patriotism and the traditional model of the society. It understands tolerance to mean approval of virtually anything and to be based upon an allegedly rational severing of the links to traditional beliefs, which are supposedly the sources of prejudice and aggression. The arguments of Jan Tomasz Gross should be understood through this radical prism.

11. A Radical Prism

In *Fear*, the author executed three maneuvers. First, he repeated widely held opinions in the West about the participation of "the Poles" in the Holocaust, and their post-war anti-Jewish aggression which was triggered by fear of retribution for the crimes committed against the Jews. Second, Gross dressed the old arguments in new, post-modernist intellectual garb. Third, he identified the sources of "Polish anti-Semitism" in a way that eerily recalls Stalinist propaganda of the mid-1940s.

Selective Jewish memoirs supply Gross with selective ammunition from the primary sources; Stalinist propaganda identifies the "reactionary enemy"; and post-modernist analysis permeates the discourse and serves as a whip against the "reactionaries." Add a selective invoking of the sources, considered as a rule outside of their broader historical context, and, *voilà*, Gross gives us cut-and-paste history.

He invokes only that which tallies with his prejudices and *a priori* formed opinions. Take the statistics of the victims, for example. Israeli scholar David Engel calculates that 327 Jews died in Poland between September 1944 and March 1947. According to my estimates, there were more victims: between 400 and 700 were killed from July 1944 to January 1947. Gross nonchalantly ignores both and arbitrarily claims that "about 1,500" Jews died. In this case, as in many others, the author of *Fear* ignores the sources, research, and opinions which fail to live up to his intellectual propositions.

Similarly, Gross is unable to come to terms with the findings of Poland's Institute of National Memory which established that several hundred Jews perished in Jedwabne, rather than the 1,600 Gross steadfastly alleges. He cannot come to acknowledge the credible reports of the collaboration of some Jews with the Communists in Soviet-occupied Eastern Poland brought back to the Free World by Jan Karski, the famed Polish courier who was also virtually the first to alarm the West about the Holocaust. Gross ignores favorable testimonies about Polish attitudes, such as underground leader Yitzhak Zuckerman's: "As the [Warsaw] ghetto was burning, I would mix with the crowd assembled to watch the ghetto walls. At that time, there was a lot of sympathy and admiration for the Jews, because everyone understood that the struggle was against the Germans. They admired the Jews' courage and strength." Examples can be multiplied.

All in all, Gross is an anti-Weigel and his Poland an anti-Samoa. *Fear* is not scholarship; it is cultural propaganda.

12. The Real Fear

There is little room, however, for a true debate about the merits of Gross's books in the American media. One star-struck pundit observed that, while Gross is "not a sociologist," he was nonetheless a "meticulous historian." But Gross indeed is a trained sociologist who uses history as his tool in America's culture wars. The fact that Gross has "won accolades from newspapers such as the *New York Times* and the *Baltimore Sun,"* is accepted as conclusive proof of the stellar quality of his scholarship, even though the reviewers in question had no expertise in the subject matter and merely paraphrased Gross's conclusions. Polish historians who have fairly criticized Gross's writings have even been summarily branded as "anti-Semites."

One fears that *Fear* will contribute to the perpetuation in the West of the myth about "Polish concentration camps," "Polish Nazis," and the allegedly exterminationist nature of "Polish anti-Semitism." Worse still, any objections against the extremist propositions voiced by Gross will be "proof" that "the Poles" remain inveterate anti-Semites because they refuse to confess their crimes; because they refuse to apologize for them and make amends for them.

Never mind that for the Polish dissident "Solidarity" intelligentsia before 1989 to be anti-Communist and anti-Soviet meant to be pro-Jewish and pro-Israeli. Never mind that since Communism collapsed the Poles have embarked upon an unprecedented soul-searching project regarding the Jewish people. Never mind that in a free Polish state topics like anti-Semitism and the Holocaust are widely debated. Never mind that they have been included in the national school curriculum. Never mind that, according to the latest report from the European Jewish Committee, anti-Semitism in Poland stands at the lowest levels in comparison to other EU countries. Never mind that Poland is arguably the friendliest of all European nations toward Israel (which is also directly related to the Polish people's strong affinity toward the United States). Never mind that the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs goes so far as to organize lectures by Gross and his supporters in Polish diplomatic missions but disallows speeches by any critics of Israel, including leftist Jews like Tony Judt (who is always welcome, however, to endorse *Fear* and other similar works on the premises of the Polish consulate in New York). None of this really matters because the ubiquitous cultural prejudice in the US assures that, for the most part, post-modernist propaganda on Jewish-Polish history persist unexamined.

It offends the memory of victims to fail to research and accurately establish the circumstances of the crime and assign the blame accordingly. Yet this is exactly Gross's failure. Having mastered the post-modernist discourse to perfection, he has been able to tap into the hearts of America's liberal intelligentsia. Worse yet, the arcane method, the obscure topic, and moral allegations of his excoriation have effectively prevented America's conservatives from debunking him and his allies. The conservatives let anti-Polish, and simultaneously anti-Christian, prejudice to ravage the American imagination with impunity. They fail to recognize that Gross and others like him abuse the powerful symbol of the Holocaust to perpetuate the cultural dominance of the Left. Since the Poles are overwhelmingly Christian and the Holocaust serves as the symbol of the ultimate evil in American popular culture, the secularists have linked Catholic Christianity to the extermination of the Jews. So ingrained has this kind of prejudice

become in the American psyche that hardly anyone realizes that the cyclical barrage of media and academic assaults is not about Poland's history and reputation but, rather, about America's present and the future.

With a modicum of good will, however, one can turn the tables on prejudice. And one can find a common language even with the liberal intelligentsia. For example, Rice University's brilliant Slavic scholar Ewa M. Thompson has successfully argued that the history of Poland, because of the Partitions in the 19th century and the Soviet and Communist occupation in the 20th, should be considered through the prism of the post-colonial paradigm. Dominated by imperial powers for two hundred years, Poland was unable to participate in Western intellectual discourse and to plead its case until now.

It is only fair that Poland is given a fair hearing now that it is free. That should be obvious to all Americans, who appreciate freedom of speech and a right to a fair trial. After all, even the Samoans finally got to tell their story.

George Wiegel, *The Cube and the Cathedral: Europe, America, and Politics Without God* (New York: Basic Books, 2005).

Jan T. Gross, *Fear: Anti-Semitism in Poland After Auschwitz: An Essay in Historical Interpretation* (New York: Random House, 2006).

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