# // Introduction

by Jonathan Schell

// Rarer by far than originality in science or art is originality in political action. And rarer still is original political action that enlarges, rather than blights or destroys, human possibilities. The opposition movement in Poland, which remains active four years after the military government of General Wojciech Jaruzelski declared a "state of war" and banned the independent trade-union federation Solidarity, has made, it seems to me, such a contribution to the world. Hitherto, probably the most original invention of our century in the field of politics was, unfortunately, the catastrophic one of totalitarianism, which so hugely expanded the human capacity for organized evil. Now, at last, many decades and tens of millions of lives later, out of the human spirit has been born what has every appearance of being the first entirely fitting response. This response, it is true, may be possible in part because the totalitarian system in question—the Soviet communist one in its Polish version—has moderated considerably since it reached its apogee of brutality, in the days of Joseph Stalin. It is also true, of course, that totalitarian governments have been effectively opposed from without, by other governments—most notably by the Allies in the Second World War, who defeated the Nazi regime militarily and then dissolved it. But now a totalitarian government has summoned forth a powerful antagonist from within its own body politic. The Polish self-limiting revolution, as it has been called—self-limiting because, al-

though it enjoyed the overwhelming support of the Polish public, it held back from attempting to overthrow the government—has many novel features. There is the crucial full-scale and sustained participation of the working class. There is the alliance of the secular opposition and the Catholic Church. There is the dedication to liberty, and the movement's internal democracy. But more important, perhaps, than any of these features has been the discovery of a new style of action—one that contributed greatly to making them all possible. Though schooled in opposition to totalitarian rule, the Polish movement has not grown to resemble its opponent; its answer to totalitarian violence and deception has not been violence and deception with some new twist, some new political coloration. Instead, in a radical break, it has ceded those ageless instruments completely to its governmental foe, and sought its strength in altogether different sources, including, above all, the multitudinous peaceful activities of a normal civic life. In doing so, it has departed not only from totalitarian practices but from the violent practices of most other revolutions. Some people have questioned whether the Polish opposition movement really amounts to a revolution. Inasmuch as it has not overthrown, or even sought to overthrow, the state, it might be said to have fallen short. Yet, as though to make up for that deficiency, it has been all the more thorough in other areas of life—the social, the cultural, the moral, and even the spiritual. In no area, however, has it been more thorough than in the area of its own practices, which constitute nothing less than a new chapter in the history of revolution. In that respect, it is not just a revolution; it is a revolution in revolution. The revolution began, suddenly and spectacularly, in August of 1980; then, in December of 1981, Solidarity, its organized arm, was outlawed and driven underground; since then, the revolution has bubbled up again in many forms, sometimes more vigorously than ever, though without again achieving dramatic organized expression at the national level. The revolution's ultimate achievement for Poland has yet to be revealed, but for the world at large the chapter of political history that has already been written is the record of an abundance of inventions and discoveries in political and moral life which no subsequent events can erase. Poland still paces up and down in its geopolitical cage, but through the bars it has already passed these inestimable gifts to the rest of us.

Among the voices that speak to us from Poland today, the most important may be that of Adam Michnik. He offers a prediction and some advice:

> I . . . believe that the totalitarian dictatorships are doomed. By now, no one gives credence to their mendacious promises. They still have the power to jail and kill, but almost no other power. I say "almost" because (alas) there still remains their ability to infect us with their own hatred and contempt. Such infection must be resisted with our whole strength, for of all the struggles we face this is the most difficult.

Michnik now sits in a jail belonging to the totalitarian regime, yet his first concern—and herein lies one of the keys to his thinking, and, one should add, to his character—is with the quality of his own conduct, which, together with the conduct of other victims of the present situation, will, he is sure, one day set the tone for whatever political system follows the totalitarian debacle. His essays are the most valuable guide we have to the origins of the revolution, and, more particularly, to its innovative practices. Michnik was born in 1946, in Warsaw, to parents whom he has described as "Polish Communists of Jewish origin." In prewar Poland, his father had spent time in prison for political activities. From early adolescence, Adam proved to be an irrepressible political activist—though of a strikingly different bent from his parents'. (By 1977, the father had become enough of a supporter of the son's anti-communist activities to join a hunger strike in a church in support of an appeal for the release of Adam and others from prison.) At fifteen, he founded a political club called the Seekers of Contradictions but known informally to many Poles as the Revisionist Toddlers. (Later, the regime, seeking to give the Toddlers a more fearsome aspect, began to refer to the club as the Commandos.) At eighteen, he was arrested for the first time, for involvement in the writing and disseminating of a letter called "An Open Letter to the Party," which was critical of the regime and was signed by Jacek Kuron and Karol Modzelewski—men in their late twenties who were prominent in the budding opposition movement. Kuron and Modzelewski received sentences of three and three and a half years, respectively; Michnik was detained in prison for

two months. Thereafter, his life became a round of political activities alternating with prison terms. In 1964, he enrolled in the History Department of Warsaw University, and in 1966 he was suspended for participating in a discussion in which the philosopher Leszek Kolakowski criticized the regime. In 1968, he helped organize a protest against the closing of the play "Forefathers' Eve," by Adam Mickiewicz, the revered nineteenth-century Polish poet, and was expelled from the university on the order of the minister of Higher Education. Protests against his expulsion were mounted at the university; so was an official campaign, tinged with anti-Semitism, against the protesters. In February of 1969, he was sentenced to three years in prison for belonging to an underground organization that was trying to overthrow the state, although in fact no such organization existed. After serving a year and a half, he was released, and took a job at the Rosa Luxemburg factory, in Warsaw, which produces light bulbs. In 1971, he left his job, and eventually he entered Poznan University as an extension student, and he remained there until 1975, when he received an M.A. in history. In May of 1977, he was arrested again, but this time he was released, along with others, only two months later, following widespread protests in the intellectual community against the arrests. In the late nineteen seventies, he helped to found the Independent Publishing House, and he also helped to found the so-called Flying University, which offered uncensored lectures in people's apartments, among other places. In August of 1980, he and several others were arrested again, and this time the workers in the shipyards in Gdansk made these prisoners' release the final condition of a historic agreement with the government—the agreement under which Solidarity was legalized. After martial law was imposed, he was imprisoned once more (this time without trial), and he was held for more than two and a half years. Six months after his release, he was rearrested, tried, convicted, and given a sentence of three years, which he is now serving.

Michnik is not a political philosopher—and certainly not a "political scientist"—nor is he a proponent of any ideology or system of political thought. His writings, like the Federalist papers of Madison and Hamilton, or the articles and letters of Gandhi, are not only reflections on action but a form of action themselves. With equal justice, one might say that his actions—together with those of countless others in

Poland—are a kind of writing, for action, when it is creative, has a power to disclose new possibilities which is as great as that of any book. Michnik's writings, then, both mirror and help to shape the new possibilities that have been and are being brought into existence by the Polish people. An ability to write about events and to participate in them at the same time is unusual. Writing, by its nature, requires solitude, whereas political action, by its nature, requires perpetual association with others. This dilemma was apparently resolved for Michnik by the authorities when they repeatedly threw him in jail. In his essay "Letter from the Gdansk Prison," written in the spring of 1985, he notes that in his recent six months of liberty he had been unable to write, but when he found himself in jail again literary production resumed immediately and, with characteristic irony and good humor, he offers to the general who had him locked up "gratitude for your thoughtful watch over my steps and for providing proper direction to my meditations." (One of the pleasures of Michnik's essays is that they combine gravity of purpose with lightness of style.) At large, Michnik stirs up so much trouble for the regime that it finds it must lock him up; but once he has been locked up he starts to write, and his letters, smuggled to the outside, are read all over Poland, and abroad, and cause, if anything, even more trouble for the regime. It's one more of the quagmires—and not the least of them, either—that the regime is at a loss to fight clear of.

The Czech writer Milan Kundera has remarked that the best novels do not merely confirm what we already know but uncover new aspects of existence. The same can be said of Michnik's political writing. He is never merely adding decibels to one side or the other of an existing argument, never merely engaging in verbal gunfire from a fixed position. Perhaps as a result of this, his essays, though produced in the midst of political struggle, are models of balance and fairness. He is concerned with deepening his own and others' understanding, and therefore he cannot afford the luxury of distortion for partisan reasons. His literary bent also militates against tendentious renderings. Of a writer whose portrait of the contemporary scene he finds too narrowly politicized, he asserts that the man misses "the whole dramatic aspect of the social and political reality . . . the fascinating panorama of defeat mixed with hope, reason with naïveté, fear with bravado." Once, when

Solidarity was functioning at its peak, an enraged mob in the city of Otwock surrounded a policeman who they believed had severely beaten up two drunks. Michnik, among others, was summoned to the scene, and, introducing himself as an "anti-socialist element," he helped calm the crowd and save the policeman from harm. The same spirit of unwillingness to see injustice done, even to those who are doing injustice to him, permeates his essays. Unwilling to bend before any regime, he is equally unwilling to surrender the independence of his mind or conscience to any rival faction or orthodoxy. In action and in word alike, he reminds us that although liberty can and probably must be guaranteed by institutions human freedom is always ultimately an achievement of the individual spirit.

In 1976, four years before Solidarity came into existence, Michnik wrote a prophetic essay called "A New Evolutionism," wherein he recommended a new direction for the political opposition, which at the time was small and relatively weak. The essay is written against the backdrop of Poland's "obligation to its friends"—one of many euphemisms used in reference to the prime fact of political life in Poland, which is the overwhelming power of the Soviet Army and the often demonstrated resolve of the Soviet Union to use it to keep its Socialist satellites under its political domination. (In no part of the world does the phrase "our friends" have a more ominous ring than in the nations of Eastern Europe.) If this threat were somehow to disappear, it seems safe to say, the Polish Communist government would fall immediately. (In actuality, of course, the disappearance of the threat is about as unlikely as any event could be in our world.) To be sure, domination by a foreign power, and by neighboring Russia in particular, is hardly a new experience for Poland: it was partitioned for more than a century—from 1795 to 1918—between Austria, Prussia, and czarist Russia, and against these military opposition was nearly as hopeless as it is against the Soviet Union now. In our day, a new factor tightens the vise in which Poland finds itself—the presence in the world of nuclear weapons. Poland is at the very heart of that part of the world which is frozen in immobility, militarily and diplomatically, by the nuclear stalemate. In the past, even though rebellion was unavailing, Poland could dream of rescue by foreign armies, or by some drastic realignment of the international order as a result of war; and, in fact,

in our century Poland was twice liberated by war from its oppressors—first when it achieved independence, in the aftermath of the First World War, and then when the Nazis were driven from Poland, only to set the stage, unfortunately, for Soviet domination of the country. Today, however, Poland has to recognize what all of Europe recognizes: that in the nuclear age the map of Europe is unlikely ever to be redrawn by marching armies. The likely alternatives offered by our time are nuclear stalemate and nuclear annihilation, and in neither is there any hope for the rescue of Poland. In sum, the Poles are kept in subjugation by a triple weight: at the local level, the totalitarian regime in Warsaw; at the national level, the threat of direct Soviet invasion; and, on the international level, the militarily paralyzing influence of nuclear weapons, which holds the whole unhappy arrangement firmly in place.

To most postwar observers, this combination of circumstances meant hopelessness, and they unhesitatingly pronounced any dramatic improvement in the situation of Poland to be impossible. Because Poland had no chance of defeating the overwhelming military and police forces arrayed against it, the argument ran (when anyone even bothered to spell out something so self-evident), any resistance was doomed to fail. It was Michnik's genius to separate the two halves of the proposition, and to accept the first (the impossibility of defeating the armies and the police forces) and reject the second (the hopelessness of all resistance). If there is an advantage to be gained from facing overwhelming adversity, it is the death of illusions: mind and body are saved from wasting themselves in pursuit of the impossible. Historically, the Poles have been the most romantic of peoples, much given to the pursuit of the long chance and the distant dream, but not even the most fevered dreams of military resistance could survive the discouragement of nuclear weapons piled on the two hundred divisions of the Soviet army piled on totalitarian rule. Final acceptance of that verdict cleared the way for new investigations, and a new kind of thinking. Abandoning, for the time being, all hope of a jailbreak, the members of the Polish opposition began to examine more closely the cell in which, it appeared, it was the country's fate to live for an indefinite period; that is, realizing that there was no salvation for Poland in our time in the movements of armies, they began to scrutinize the minutiae of their local environment. Soviet troops, it was plain, could not be

driven out of Poland; but what if ten people gathered in someone's apartment and listened to an uncensored lecture on Polish history? The Communist party could perhaps not be dislodged from its "leading role" in affairs of state; but what if a group of workers began to publish a newsletter in which factory conditions were truthfully described? And what if millions of people, casting off fear, began to take local action of this sort all over the country? The new ferment, in the words of Irena Grudzinska-Gross in *The Art of Solidarity,* would be "an effort to overstep the limits of the political horizon while remaining inside the same geographical borders."

Perhaps the most acute mind training the lens of its political microscope on these questions was Michnik's. In "A New Evolutionism" he surveys the political scene and proposes a new path of action. He works from the assumption that "to believe in overthrowing the dictatorship of the Party by revolution . . . is both unrealistic and dangerous." He yearns for full independence for Poland but accepts the fact that any project for attaining it in the foreseeable future is hopeless. Nevertheless, he discerns opportunities for action of a kind that he believes can be highly successful. Between the rock of Soviet power and the hard place of contemporary Polish life, he discovers a space. In the conventional view, the interests of the Soviet Union and those of Polish society are unalterably opposed across the board. Michnik arrives at a startlingly different conclusion. "The interests of the Soviet political leadership, the Polish political leadership, and the Polish democratic opposition," he writes, "are basically concurrent." They are concurrent because for all three of them Soviet military intervention would be a disaster: for the Soviet leadership because it would suffer huge and lasting losses in its global political prestige; for the Polish leadership because it would lose the limited sovereignty it now enjoys and, furthermore, might be "dethroned"; and for the Polish opposition because of the bloodshed and the increased rigors of direct Soviet rule. Such an invasion would precipitate "a war that Poland . . . could not win on the battlefield but that the Soviet Union could not win politically." The concurring interests of the three parties, he concludes, define "an area of permissible political maneuver . . . the sphere of possible compromise."

Approaching the question of what can be done, Michnik canvasses

past efforts, and it is wholly characteristic of the spirit of his writing that even when his final judgment of one effort or another is negative he gives generous credit for whatever good was achieved. Michnik is anything but a Hegelian dialectician—anything but a believer in blind forces of history acting behind men's backs—but he always keeps an eye on the larger historical story of which any particular initiative is a part, and is keenly aware that the inch of progress made in one decade, though inadequate in itself, and perhaps based on false premises, may make possible the next inch in the next decade. In Poland's recent past he identifies two schools of reform: the revisionists, who sought to soften and liberalize communist rule by invoking the humane aspects of Marxist and other socialist theory; and the so-called neo-positivists, a Catholic group that rejected communism in principle yet sought as a matter of pragmatic policy to moderate it by cooperating with it, even to the extent of participating in the Polish parliament. Revisionism, Michnik writes, was "faithful to the Bible [that is, to Marxism], although it interpreted it in its own way," while neo-positivism "adhered to the Church [that is, the actuality of the communist government], hoping that it would sooner or later disappear." Both were techniques of working within the system—of appealing to "the rational thinking of the Communist Prince"—and for a while both brought limited positive results, often in the form of books and articles and a slightly freer intellectual atmosphere. Yet both schools had to pay the price that is always paid by those who choose to work within the system: they were required, in order to maintain their influence, to renounce ties with people dedicated to changing the system from without. The fatal crisis for each school came, therefore, when protest from without boiled over: for the revisionists in 1968, when the student movement in favor of liberalization of intellectual life arose, and was crushed by the closing of some university departments, the expulsion of students, and reprisals against their parents; and for the neo-positivists in 1976, when workers demonstrated against an announced rise in food prices, and the government took extremely harsh reprisals. At those moments, any opposition that hoped to retain its standing in the society at large had to declare which side it supported—"that of the beaters or that of the beaten"—and because neither reform movement was able to do this both lost the public's confidence.

Michnik's analysis of the failure of the efforts to change the system from within leads him to make a pivotal recommendation: "I believe that what sets today's opposition apart from the proponents of those ideas of reform in the past is the belief that a program for evolution ought to be addressed to independent public opinion, and not to totalitarian power. Such a program would offer advice to the people regarding how to behave, not to the government regarding how to reform itself." The suggestion was simple, but its implications were radical. The change in the venue of action entailed a change in substance. Those who took the route of working with the Prince depended on the decisions and whims of the Prince to achieve any results. But those who took the route of working in and with the society could act directly. Then it was up to the government to *re*act. The first method, based on the belief that the government, by holding a monopoly on the instruments of force, also monopolized political power, viewed cooperation with the government as the only way to share in power. The second method, based on the belief that there were sources of power elsewhere, in public opinion, sought to develop those. And yet Michnik, unlike many people in other times and places who had given up on the government in power and turned to the public for redress, did not seek the overthrow of the government. Rather, he wanted the society immediately and directly to take over its own destiny in certain realms of life, and only then to turn to the government—for negotiation. The eventual result, he hoped, would be a "hybrid," based on a compromise in which the government, while holding on to state power, would acknowledge and accept other, independent institutions in the society. Michnik enumerates the groups in society that he hopes will advance "a new evolutionism." First, and most important, are the workers, whose participation is "a necessary condition for the evolution of public life toward democracy." The key event, he foresees with uncanny accuracy, will be the foundation of independent "institutions representing the interests of workers." Second is the Catholic Church, which has always remained independent but has recently shown an increasing interest in defending the independence and the rights of others, including the workers. In the Church, Michnik notes, "Jeremiads against 'Godless ones' have given way to documents that quote the principles of the Declaration of Human Rights." Third is

the intelligentsia, whose duty it is to think through alternative programs while defending fundamental moral and political principles.

Michnik acted on his own advice, and was soon busy organizing and participating in a host of independent groups. One deserves special mention: the Workers' Defense Committee usually known as KOR—the acronym of its Polish name. KOR did not agitate politically, or otherwise address the government. Instead, it set out to render concrete assistance—financial, legal, and medical—to workers and their families who had suffered in one way or another from government repression. Indeed, the committee explicitly declared its purposes to be not political but social, and it restricted its activity to what Jan Jósef Lipski, one of its founders, who has written an excellent history of the organization, refers to as "social work." But what in the eyes of KOR might be considered social was considered by the government definitely political, for in a totalitarian system every aspect of collective existence is supposed to originate with the government and be under its management. In this deep reach of totalitarian government into daily life, which is usually seen as a source of its strength, KOR discovered a point of weakness: precisely because totalitarian governments politicize daily life, daily life becomes a vast terrain on which totalitarianism can be opposed. It was here that KOR implicitly pitted itself against the regime. In consequence, the KOR members soon began to suffer the repression against which they sought to defend the workers—loss of employment, arrest, imprisonment, beatings, and, in a few cases, loss of their lives. It was just one of the remarkable qualities of this organization that its members were willing to suffer government reprisal not in the name of some sweeping political program or visionary goal but in order to get some money into the hands of a fatherless family or to arrange for favorable testimony in the trial of a worker. Only great goals might seem to warrant great sacrifices, but the KOR workers were ready to make great sacrifices for modest goals. "In some dissident circles . . . KOR members were sneered at as 'social workers,'" Lipski writes, "but within KOR such a designation by one's colleagues was regarded as an honor."

The adoption of an overall policy of direct action in society entailed the adoption of a number of other policies that were novel in the closed

society of Poland. One was the policy of openness. When KOR was founded, in September of 1976, its members wrote a declaration of purpose to which they not only signed their names but also—an act without precedent for an opposition group in Poland—affixed their addresses and telephone numbers. Thereafter, the committee followed as much as possible a policy of open, public action. Closely related to the policy of openness was the policy of truthfulness. In all its statements and publications, KOR strove meticulously for factual accuracy. Characteristically, there was both an idealistic and a pragmatic reason for this policy. The members believed in telling the truth for its own sake, and they also calculated that in a society surfeited with lies an organization that hewed strictly to the truth would win support and gain strength. Another new policy was "autonomy of action." Autonomy was what the opposition wished for Poland as a whole and for every person in Poland. The members of KOR inaugurated it by making it a principle of their own actions. "There was no question of ordering someone by command of the organization to do something he did not want to do," Lipski writes, and he adds, "There was a principle that if what they wanted to do was not contrary to the principles of KOR they should be allowed to pursue their own ideas. And this is why everything that was done was done by people motivated by their own initiative and enthusiasm, and thus produced the best results." It is striking that the activists of the Polish opposition spoke as much of autonomy, which is the capacity of each person for acting freely, as they did of liberty, which is a person's right to do so. (In the West, you might say, we as individuals have great liberty but little autonomy. We have the right to determine the shape of our own future, but we do not bother to avail ourselves of it very much.) Still another policy was that of trust. Ordinarily, we think of the trust we place in someone as more or less a by-product, produced involuntarily in us by the other person's trustworthy actions, and do not think of it as the result of a policy, or even of any intention on our part. But for KOR trust was indeed a policy. One reason for this was the danger of infiltration by undercover police: a decision had to be made regarding what steps, if any, should be taken to guard against this. KOR's decision was to reject suspicion and all the equipment and procedures that go with it, and "to trust everyone within the bounds of common sense."

The policies of openness, truthfulness, autonomy of action, and trust, which together might be described simply as a policy of militant decency, were not elements in any master plan, but they were of a piece. They equipped KOR not so much to do battle with the government as to work around it. Although KOR did not have any designs on state power, it did hope that activity independent of the government would spread by contagion—that there would occur a sort of epidemic of freedom in the closed society. Lipski observes, "The long-range goal of KOR was to stimulate new centers of autonomous activity in a variety of areas and among a variety of social groups independent of KOR. Not only did KOR agree to their independence but it also wanted them to be independent." Its hope was abundantly fulfilled in the years just ahead.

Nothing illuminates the inner spirit of KOR, which strikes me as an exemplary organization for our time, more clearly than its final act. In September of 1981, the members decided that its role was being filled by Solidarity, and voted the KOR organization out of existence. Missing entirely from KOR, apparently, was that compound of personal interest, factional rivalry, and bureaucratic momentum which, acting independently of all external reasons and causes, often supersedes the purposes for which an organization was founded, and transforms it into a dead weight on the world. When KOR's *reason* for existing dissolved, *it* dissolved. To paraphrase George Orwell's comment on Gandhi, "How clean a smell it has managed to leave behind!"

In August of 1980, the stream of KOR flowed into the great river of Solidarity, but had already done much to determine the course of the river's flow. The policies of openness, truthfulness, autonomy of action, and trust were preserved. "The essence" of the movement, as Michnik later wrote from prison, still "lay in the attempt to reconstruct society, to restore social bonds outside official institutions." What ensued was an eruption throughout the society of civic activity of immense diversity, ranging from the trade unions themselves to associations formed to halt pollution and to protect consumers (areas that had been monumentally neglected by the regime). One is reminded of Tocqueville's description of America: "Americans of all ages, all conditions, and all dispositions constantly form associations. They have not only commercial and manufacturing companies, in which all take part, but associations of a

thousand other kinds, religious, moral, serious, futile, general or restricted, enormous or diminutive. The Americans make associations to give entertainments, to found seminaries, to build inns, to construct churches, to diffuse books, to send missionaries to the antipodes." (The notable difference, of course, was that whereas the local groups in Tocqueville's America worked more or less in harmony with the national government those in Poland worked in opposition to it.) In this burst of activity, the very ingredients of political life, having been pounded apart by forty years of totalitarian rule, now came together again in new and vital forms. The classic formula for revolution is first to seize state power and then to use that power to do the good things you believe in. In the Polish revolution, the order was reversed. It began to do the good things immediately, and only then turned its attention to the state. In a sort of political and moral version of the hedonist's credo "*Carpe diem,*" the opposition proceeded directly, and without postponement, toward its goals. Its simple but radical guiding principle was to start doing the things you think should be done, and to start being what you think society should become. Do you believe in freedom of speech? Then speak freely. Do you love the truth? Then tell it. Do you believe in an open society? Then act in the open. Do you believe in a decent and humane society? Then behave decently and humanely. In Michnik's words in "A New Evolutionism," "every act of defiance permits us to build right now the framework of democratic socialism, which should be not just a legal and institutional structure but, what is even more important, a real, day-to-day community of free people." And, as he puts it in the same essay, "in their struggle for truth, or—to quote Leszek Kolakowski—'by living in dignity,' the opposition intellectuals are striving not only for the proverbial better tomorrow but also for a better today."

Timothy Garton Ash, the author of "The Polish Revolution: Solidarity," has aptly noted that the opposition's style has been to act "as if" Poland were already a free country. And once those in opposition began to act that way something unexpected happened. As soon as they started to act "as if," the "as if" started to melt away. Then they really *were* defending the worker (and often with success), or giving the lecture, or publishing the book. It wasn't "as if" it were a book, it *was* a book, and soon people were really reading it. Of course, in the country

at large the "as if" did not melt away. That became clear when the book was confiscated, or the lecture was broken up by a government goon squad, or the innocent worker was sent off to prison in spite of the opposition's best efforts to defend him. Nevertheless, in the immediate vicinity of the action—and that vicinity expanded steadily as the movement grew—the "as if" was no pretense. There a small realm of liberty was created. And "liberty, when men act in bodies," Burke wrote, "is *power*." Thus a second surprising discovery was made by the opposition—the discovery that merely by fearlessly carrying on the business of daily life it grew powerful. But the power gained was not power that had been wielded by others and had now been wrested from them; it was new power, which had been created where there had been none before. The program, then, was not to seize political power from the state but to build up the society. In 1970, demonstrating workers had been brutalized by the police, whereupon some of them marched to Party Committee buildings—known in Poland simply as Committees—and burned them down. Later, Jacek Kuroń offered a piece of advice that gained renown and foreshadowed the future course of events: "Don't burn down Committees; found your own."

The distinction between "society," which was to be renewed by the movement, and "power," which was to be left to the state, became common currency within the opposition, and was the subject of much discussion. While no one really expected the government to "wither away," as in the old Leninist dream, a certain contemptuous indifference to it did develop among the members of the opposition. This indifference showed itself radiantly in the extraordinary personal courage demonstrated by people at all levels of society, who at times acted as if there were no repressive government in Poland, and it also showed itself, less happily, in the utter failure of the movement to anticipate the imposition of martial law: that took the leadership of Solidarity by surprise almost the way Solidarity had taken the government by surprise sixteen months earlier. Just as society had massed its millions for action without being noticed by the government, so the government now massed its soldiers and police for action without being noticed by society. It may be that the two sides underestimated each other's strength so drastically because they possessed different *kinds* of strength, and each side judged the other on the basis of its own kind:

to the government the opposition looked weak because it lacked military and police power, while to the opposition the government looked weak because it lacked public support. According to the "realistic" laws of the government's existence, the Solidarity movement was an impossibility, but equally, according to the more "idealistic" laws of Solidarity's existence, martial law was impossible. Michnik has characterized the difference memorably:

> The mighty and spontaneous social movement, deprived of examples, changing from one day to the next amid incessant conflicts with the authorities, did not possess a clear vision of piecemeal goals or a well-defined concept of coexistence with the communist regime. It allowed itself to be provoked into fights over minor issues, into inessential conflicts; it was full of disorder, incompetence, unfamiliarity with its enemies and the enemies' methods. Solidarity knew how to strike but not how to be patient; it knew how to attack head-on but not how to retreat; it had overall ideas but not a program for short-term actions. It was a colossus with legs of steel and hands of clay; it was powerful among factory crews but powerless at the negotiating table. Across from it sat its partner, which could not be truthful, run an economy, or keep its word, which could do only one thing: break up social solidarity. This partner had mastered this art in the thirty-seven years of its rule. This partner, the power élite, was a moral and financial bankrupt and was unable, because of its political frailty, to practice any type of politics. . . . The Polish communist system was a colossus with legs of clay and hands of steel.

What was perhaps most surprising about the imposition of martial law was the surprise itself. In less than a year and a half, Solidarity had made its "ideals" enough of a "reality" so that the effectiveness of time-tested tricks of repressive rule like martial law had been all but forgotten by a whole country. Solidarity lived by trust and it died by trust. Certainly this costly inattention to the government's plotting was a failure of the movement, yet it was a failure that had a certain definite grandeur.

In *A Warsaw Diary*, Ryszard Kapuściński writes, "Here everything is based on a certain principle of asymmetrical verification: the system

promises to prove itself *later* (announcing a general happiness that exists only in the future), but it demands that you prove yourself now, *today,* by demonstrating your loyalty, consent, and diligence. You commit yourself to everything; the system to nothing." The opposition worked in exactly the opposite way. It proved itself *today,* and let *later* take care of itself. In so doing, it offered a new approach to one of the most intractable problems of all political life: the endemic discrepancy between evil means and good ends in politics—between the brutal and mendacious methods commonly accepted as a necessity of politics and the noble or visionary ends toward which these means are directed. In the direct action in society practiced by the opposition movement in Poland, means and ends were rolled into one. Every means was an end, and vice versa. For example, each of the "means" of KOR—openness, truthfulness, autonomy, and trust—was also an end. A courageous act or a truthful word was a good "end"—in itself, it enriched life, made life better—and a redressed grievance or an improvement in a factory's production was a good "means" to further accomplishment. To reform the adversary might take some time, but in the sphere of one's own actions the just society could be established right away. It followed that evil means could no longer be employed to attain good ends. If the journey and the destination were the same, it made no sense to spoil the conveyance in which one was riding. Here, I believe, is the source of the movement's nonviolence, which was especially striking for being practiced even more rigorously than it was preached—a discrepancy far more attractive and more unusual than the reverse discrepancy. The use of violence, spoiling means and ends at the same time, would have polluted the source of both the movement's virtue and its strength. The elements of the movement's style of action—its direct approach to society and its problems, its local emphasis, its rejection of violence and lying and other base means of striving for noble ends—formed a self-consistent whole. If you wished to act locally, then what could be more local than yourself? And if you wished to produce results *today,* then what area of life was more ready to hand, more thoroughly within your grasp, than your own actions? And if, accordingly, you made yourself and your own actions your starting point for the reform of society, then how could you permit those actions to be degraded by brutality, deception, or any other disfigurement? While this style of

action was nonviolent, "nonviolence" seems both too restrictive and too negative a term with which to describe it: too restrictive because, along with being nonviolent, the movement was nondeceptive, nonsecretive, and non many other obnoxious things; and too negative because the deepest source of its strength was not any form of abstinence but, rather, the positive, energetic, open pursuit of a free and just society through incessant public action of the kind advocated by Michnik. The genius of the movement lay in its having seized upon a method of action that did not depend on violence and whose strength would have been undercut by the use of violence. A little violence would probably have been as harmful to Solidarity as a little pacifism would be to an army in the middle of a war.

The opposition movement's nonviolence was almost certainly a precondition for the strong support that the movement received from the Catholic Church—support that, by all accounts, was indispensable to it. Most observers agree that the national spirit that gave rise to Solidarity was born more than a year earlier, in June of 1979, when Pope John Paul II, the first Polish pope, returned for the first time to Poland. Shortly after the visit, Michnik described the crucial inner change in the mood of the public which it brought about:

> Julian Stryjkowski's phrase "Poland's second baptism" keeps coming to mind insistently. Indeed, something odd did happen. The very same people who are ordinarily frustrated and aggressive in the shop lines were metamorphosed into a cheerful and happy collectivity, a people filled with dignity. The police vanished from the main streets of Warsaw and exemplary order reigned everywhere. The people who had been deprived of their real power for so long all of a sudden regained their ability to determine their fate. This is how the social consequences of John Paul II's visit-pilgrimage can be sketched.

A movement born in a "second baptism" must remain faithful to its spiritual origin or lose its strength, and this movement's ability to remain faithful was made possible by the new style of action it had adopted. In modern times, the introduction of spiritual, or even purely moral, purposes into political life has been justifiably regarded with

deep suspicion. The City of God and the City of Man, the argument runs, are in essence based on principles so different that for either to adopt the principles of the other will prove ruinous. The danger for the City of God is that by associating itself with the evil means that are supposedly intrinsic and necessary to political life it will be brutalized and lose its spiritual purity. The danger for the City of Man is that by adopting principles of pacifism, or even of mildness, that are embodied in such teachings as the Sermon on the Mount it will be enfeebled, and collapse, or else that in the attempt to wed the evil means of political life to the pure ends of spiritual life the evil means will be given even greater license than usual, and fanaticism and violence will increase. (The course of events in present-day Iran, where otherworldly purity is pursued with this-worldly brutality, shows that the danger is as real in our time as it has been in any other.) In view of these perils, many wise observers have suggested that the two Cities be kept apart; yet separation also has a cost. The moral teachings of religion lose half their field of operation if it must be acknowledged that right at the heart of human affairs there is a realm—the political—to which they have no application. At the same time, political life is set adrift morally if the moral standards that apply to private life are excluded from it. It is always possible to try to frame moral standards that apply to the political world alone, but every time someone makes a really thoroughgoing attempt—Machiavelli's writings are perhaps the most prominent example—we find that our private standards are violated, and we are repelled. This ancient opposition between the spiritual and the political realms is, at the very least, eased if in the political realm a method of action is adopted that does not cite noble ends as justification for evil means, or even distinguish between means and ends. Then spiritual and moral energies can flow into the political world without necessarily being corrupted. The two Cities then rest on a common foundation; namely, respect for the dignity and worth of the individual person, whose degradation "today" for some noble purpose "in the future" is rejected. This is not to say that political life can henceforth proceed to perfection—that the fulfillment promised by utopian revolutionaries can materialize forthwith—but only that the actors in the political realm invite judgment of their actions by the same standards that everyone

accepts in private life. Political life, then, will be no closer to perfect than private life is, but it will no longer be singled out as a realm in which certain evils are in principle necessary and therefore justified.

Ever since Gandhi led India to independence through nonviolent action, it has become something of a cliché to say that nonviolence could succeed only against a parliamentary democracy like England—that it would have failed against a totalitarian power, such as Stalin's Soviet Union or Hitler's Germany. Inasmuch as Poland has not attained its independence—or, for that matter, even aimed at it—this assumption still holds. And it seems only reinforced when one reflects that the regime in Poland today, though brutal, is far more moderate than the regime of either Stalin or Hitler. Nevertheless, it is now a matter of record that by far the most effective resistance movement ever launched against a totalitarian regime was completely nonviolent. Nonviolent action, far from being helpless in the face of totalitarianism, turns out to be especially well suited to fighting it. Hence it would be misleading to suggest that the Poles made a free choice of nonviolence over violence, as though they had been offered an opportunity to overthrow the regime by violence but had turned it down on the ground of moral principle in favor of nonviolence. Rather, from the outset violence was recognized by almost everybody to be completely useless to the movement. Addressing the question of why the movement adopted nonviolent means, Michnik writes, "No one in Poland is able to prove today that violence will help us to dislodge Soviet troops from Poland and to remove communists from power. The U.S.S.R. has such enormous military power that confrontation is simply unthinkable. In other words: we have no guns." The decision against violence, then, was made not so much by the Poles themselves as by their historical situation. The greatness of the Polish movement lies not in a decision to renounce violence—although the self-discipline required to flawlessly maintain a policy of nonviolence in the heat and anger of the struggle deserves great credit—but in its discovery of peaceful means that still offered hope.

Historically, violence has usually been regarded as the ultima ratio—the final arbiter, to which people turn in the last, desperate hour, when all peaceful means have been tried and have failed. "Hallowed are the arms where no hope exists but in them," Livy writes. But when

those hallowed arms fail, people have believed, all that remains is the silence either of submission or of death. In Poland, that sequence appears to have been reversed: the futility of violent means—a futility so evident to all that such means did not even have to be tested—was what led to a recourse to nonviolent ones. It was as though beyond the traditional means of last resort new, peaceful ones had been discovered. The government declared a "state of war," and, employing its monopoly of the means of violence against an unarmed society, it "won" the war. (In Michnik's mocking account, "General Jaruzelski has glorified the name of the Polish armed forces by capturing with a flanking movement the building of the Polish Radio and Television, not to mention the telephone exchange.") In the traditional scheme of things, that would be the end of the story; the last resort would have been exhausted, the last card played, and the population would resign itself to defeat. But this has not happened. It seems, Michnik writes, that "the Polish nation does not think it has been defeated." Failing to think it has been defeated, it fails to act as if it had been defeated, and, failing to act defeated, it is not defeated. "What I saw after my release"—on August 4, 1984—"exceeded not just my expectations but even my dreams," Michnik reports. "I found that the people of Solidarity were wise, determined, ready for a long struggle." The government crackdown has taken its toll, but the spirit of opposition is alive. Repression and activism continue side by side. The arrests are made, but people are not intimidated. They live now in what may be the most curious conditions to have developed in Poland so far: autonomy without liberty—freedom together with jail.

Poland's unfinished experiment in nonviolent action is of particular interest in a world in which violence in the form of the weapons of mass destruction threatens the ultimate self-defeat of man. While the Polish revolution may appear to have little to do with the nuclear question, it seems to me that there is an interesting parallel to be drawn between the plight of Poland under Soviet domination and the plight of the world in the nuclear age. For both Poland and the world, sane thinking must begin with the recognition that the use of violence is futile, self-defeating, and thus "unthinkable." (Michnik's use of this word seems significant.) Both Poland and the world are therefore driven to search for nonviolent solutions to their dilemmas. On this point,

realism and idealism coincide, and nonviolence, so often regarded exclusively as a choice of idealists, is supremely realistic. And both Poland and the world have been advised by expert opinion that their plights are inescapable, and they should accept the status quo; anything else, both are told, would "destabilize" the existing situation. Yet Poland has, at the very least, found a path to follow, and in this there is hope for the world, too. We are led to wonder whether in the realm of international affairs and diplomacy there may not be a solution as unlikely in the eyes of the experts as Solidarity was—some ultima ratio beyond violence which the world is driven to employ, for reasons both pragmatic and idealistic, precisely because violence, the old ultima ratio, is now useless and bankrupt. If such a solution should be found, and if it should be employed to reunite a divided Europe, then it would be not only a counterpart of the Polish movement but a complement to it. Then Poland and the world would escape from their plights along the same path.

It is tempting to sum up by saying that the Polish revolution practiced a politics based on life, in which political power, assuming the form of public consent and public support, is the natural and spontaneous extension of human beings' ability to act together to build and create, whereas the government practiced a politics of death, in which political power, assuming the form of fear, is an extension of human beings' ability to tear down and destroy—ultimately, to kill one another. But Michnik, it seems to me, might bridle at such a description, finding in it the seeds of what, in his essay "Maggots and Angels," he calls the political sin of Manichaeanism, in which one assigns all evil to one's foe and all good to oneself. Michnik rejects political Manichaeanism wherever he sees it, but he finds it especially inappropriate for Poland. Acknowledging, as he does, that Soviet power is irremovable from the Polish scene for the foreseeable future, he recognizes that everyone, even the most courageous, must accommodate this reality in one way or another. That being so, it is impossible to divide Poland cleanly into two hostile camps, one evil and the other good. Instead, evil and good are distributed widely and subtly. They will be found in one balance in the government official who has to decide whether to be a little more ruthless and ideological in his decisions or to be a little bit more humane and pragmatic, in another balance in the professor

who has to decide just how truthful to be in a certain monograph; and in yet another balance in the jailed activist who has to decide whether to sign the "loyalty oath" that the government has put before him as the price of his release. The first may be a largely greedy and self-interested person; the second may be basically decent but frightened; the third may be heroic but wavering. But in all of them good and evil are present, and in each case Michnik would like to see the good prevail—or, at least, advance a little. In this vision of society's betterment, no one can be wholly written off as a "maggot" and no one granted exemption from the human condition as an "angel."

The epithet "maggot" is not Michnik's own but was used originally by the contemporary writer Piotr Wierzbicki, in a satiric essay called "A Treatise on Maggots," in which he lists the various rationalizations that selfish or hypocritical or weak-willed people use to evade their responsibility to oppose the regime. Michnik responds by engaging in a novel exercise. He sorts through Polish history, asking which people, by Wierzbicki's criteria, would have to be called maggots, and concludes that many of the most highly honored figures would at some point in their careers have qualified. Michnik's purpose is not to discredit the heroes of Polish history but, rather, to encourage a more tolerant understanding of the compromises of the present day. History is often consulted by those seeking to assemble a list of grievances or to draw up an indictment. Michnik's intention is just the opposite: he uses history to forgive the present. Central to his argument is a recognition that the need for compromise had its origin in those political situations "where foreign domination of the Polish nation was chronic, while all hope for armed defense of national values was completely illusory; where compromise with a partitioning power became indispensable for saving the very existence of the nation." In such circumstances—which, of course, are also Poland's present ones—arguments for compromise with the regime, or even participation in it, can never be dismissed out of hand. While it is true that "full acceptance of the compromise formula would lead to moral compromise and spiritual capitulation," it is also true that "full rejection of this formula would lead to a more or less heroic isolation." Using historical examples, Michnik shows that different—and even seemingly opposite—stands could all have merits of their own. Those on the inside might

found institutions—a railroad, a university—of real and lasting importance to the country; those rebelling against the regime on the outside might be defending the country's honor and inoculating it against occupation at some future time. The eminent figures who made these choices debated fiercely, and often bitterly (Michnik offers fascinating accounts of the debates in his historical essays), but now Michnik seeks what he calls, quoting the writer Antoni Slonimski, "angerless wisdom," in which the contributions made by those figures whose choices differed are acknowledged, and might inspire more tolerance and cooperation among people who face the same choices today. In this vision, understanding, toleration, and forgiveness are the watchwords for each person's dealings with others, yet there is still a realm in which exacting judgment is called for—one's dealings with oneself. Michnik implies as much in an eloquent passage whose direct point is that no one can make a moral choice for another.

> Aleksander Wat wrote somewhere that there is only one answer to the question of how intellectuals who live in countries ruled by Stalin should behave. It is the Shakespearean answer: they should die.
>
> Perhaps it is the true answer. But I believe that this is an answer that one can give only to oneself, a measure that one can apply only to oneself, a sacrifice that one can ask only of oneself. Anyone who demands an answer to this question from others is arbitrarily giving himself the right to decide about others' lives. And this usually ends badly.

Michnik does not say that he is ready to die, but then he feels no need to say it, since he has no advice to offer anyone else on the subject. In any case, when it comes to sacrifice, actions speak louder than words. Michnik counsels us to refrain from demanding self-sacrifice from other people, but frequently he offers that counsel from jail.

Throughout the history of political affairs there flows an unending stream of human blood. Sometimes it swells to a torrent, bearing all before it, and sometimes it slows to a trickle, but it has never dried up completely. In our time, it threatens to overflow its banks once and for all and sweep away history itself. Some may reluctantly accept

bloodshed as a necessity of political life, some may deplore it, and some may embrace it, but all who enter the political world must come to terms with it in one way or another. The Polish opposition movement, for which and about which Michnik writes, did not add a single drop to this stream, except that which flowed from its own members' veins. And, while the movement has so far been unable to restrain the violence and repression of its antagonists, the positions it has staked out in the fight—fearless readiness to act in support of one's convictions; unwillingness to lower one's standards, in the name of effectiveness, to the level of one's antagonists'; readiness to make unlimited sacrifice in pursuit of limited goals; respect, in practice as well as theory, for the dignity of each person; readiness to die but unwillingness to kill; and unwavering resolve to live one's beliefs in the moment, so that even in supposed defeat something of beauty and value is left behind in the world—are among the most honorable, the most original, and the most fruitful of which the world has record. From within his prison cell, defying his captors, Adam Michnik writes, in words that will sound down the decades:

> To these people, with their lifeless but shifting eyes, with their minds that are dull but skilled in torture, with their defiled souls that yearn for social approval, you are only raw material with which to do anything they please. They have their own particular psychology: they believe that anyone can be talked into anything (in other words, everyone can be either bought or intimidated). To them, it is only a matter of the price to exact or the pain to inflict. Although their actions are routine, your every stumble, your every fall gives meaning to their lives. Your capitulation is no mere professional achievement for them—it is their raison d'être. And so you find yourself engaged in a philosophical debate with them about the meaning of your life, about taking the meaning away from their lives, about giving meaning to every human existence. You are engaged in the argument of Giordano Bruno with the Inquisitor, of the Decembrist with the czarist police superintendent, of Walerian Lukasinski with the czarist angel of annihilation, of Carl von Ossietzky with the blond Gestapo officer, of Osip Mandelstam with a member of the Bolshevik Party dressed in a uniform with the blue

piping of the N.K.V.D.; you are engaged in the never-ending argument about which Henryk Elzberg once said that the value of your achievement cannot be gauged in terms of your idea's chances for victory but rather by the value of the idea itself. In other words, you score a victory not when you win power but when you remain faithful to yourself.