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I.

The movement of “Solidarity” is a phenomenon that cannot be ignored by anyone who wishes to understand the events of the last two decades in Poland and in the world.¹ Yet, there is a difference between a political analysis of “Solidarity” as one of the factors that contributed to the fall of the “Evil Empire” and understanding the internal sense of the experience, which – before it changed the world – had deeply transformed its participants’ consciousness. This experience was something absolutely extraordinary. It is not surprising then that researchers who strive to reliably describe this period often refer to a category quite unusual for scholars, the category of a miracle. The task which I undertake here is to reveal the meaning of this “miracle,” while for the originary experience – in the phenomenological sense of the word – I take the

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¹ The paper was first published in 2001 [trans.].

160 time of the “First Solidarity,” meaning, 1980–81.² The later fortunes of the “Solidarity” movement, from the Martial Law to the time of rebuilding an independent nation-state, are a process of gradually forgetting about this primordial originary experience.

At the beginning I wish to make two introductory notes. First, although the concept of solidarity has a long tradition,³ both Christian and socialist, reflection – very interesting for many reasons – upon the history of this idea will not be of much use when understanding the events of 1980–81. As long as we do not actually know what experience hides behind the name of the “Solidarity” movement, we will not know whether recalling famous thinkers who used this term in the past does not miss the point.

Second, when searching for the originary sense of the experience of Solidarity, it is important not to make a fetish of the word as such. “Solidarity” is only a sign, only a name for some essential experience. The name is in some sense coincidental. It is possible to imagine many others, more or less apt, such as brotherhood or unity (the latter was seriously taken into consideration), which could have become in 1980 a motto of the independent trades union and later a symbol for the whole movement. Even if those events had happened under a different name and a different graphic symbol, their course would have been roughly the same. An excessive attachment to the label “Solidarity” may cause our originary experience to be overshadowed or interrupted with totally different phenomena that have appeared and still appear under the banner of “Solidarity.”

Looking for one common originary experience we immediately encounter an objection that no such thing existed. Individual experiences from the time of the “First Solidarity” differed significantly depending on the point of view of particular persons and their role. However, regardless of those differences, we can discover in the experiences of various people something that connected everyone and whose presence everyone was aware of. What was most important was the unusually intense experience of community. The most essential sense of the “First Solidarity” was the universal awareness of a profound tie with other people. Bonds that connect people, however, can have various sources and forms. At the heart, the dispute over the sense of the community born in the years 1980–81 is about the question, “what bond lay at its foundations?”

II.

One of the important answers to this question arises from the republican tradition, and especially from the fascination with the thought of Hannah

² The term “First Solidarity” refers to the social movement born in August 1980 and lasting until the introduction of the Martial Law in December 1981 and differentiates it from the underground movement and the later political party [trans.].

³ Cf. Z. Stawrowski, “O zapomnianej solidarności” [On the Forgotten Solidarity], *Znak* issue 543 (8/2000), pp. 60–67.

Arendt.⁴ As it is widely known, Arendt tried to restore the ideal of a political community whose prime example was the ancient *isonomia*, a community of citizens equal in their right to participate in the most important state decisions. According to Arendt, it is the civic life – the self-conscious responsibility for the fate of the community – that constitutes the dimension of existence in which, overcoming the pressure of natural necessity, man attains the fullness of his life: the feeling of happiness and the experience of creative freedom. This mode of living, forgotten since ancient times, powerfully reappeared in modern revolutions, the American and the French. Then, it continued to make itself felt at various places and times in spontaneously developed forms of citizen self-organization; Arendt mentions here the Paris Commune of 1871, the Russian February Revolution of 1917 and the Hungarian Revolution of 1956. One may assume that had the author of *On Revolution* lived long enough to witness the events of August '80 in Poland, her description of “elementary republics” and the process of their coordination and integration on the basis of the federal principle would assuredly be enriched with yet another example.

An advantage of using Arendt's categories to analyze the phenomenon of “Solidarity” is that they let us see in those events something transcending the local perspective. Some even say that, thanks to the “Solidarity” experience, Poland is “one of the few nations that has experienced an indigenous democratic revolution which renders it comparable to the American and French cases.”⁵ Setting Poland in the company of the indisputable precursors of the modern political order can no doubt ennoble it. However, there seem to be serious reasons for which the experience of Solidarity and its unique, and at the same time universal, sense stand apart and should be seen as the most important even in this eminent group of the most crucial historic events.

It requires abandoning, or rather, complementing Arendt's perspective, who herself saw that her analyses of political community do not include an important factor which effectively hampers the constitution of the enduring space for political freedom. It would seem that the abrupt fall of forming self-governing communities in all previous cases is a sufficient argument to look for and analyze powerful forces present in the political domain and connected with party strife for power. Instead, Arendt tried to enchant those powers with the magic might of her philosophical language, denying them political significance, and reducing their sense to functional matters connected with managing the sphere of things. Yet, it is impossible to fully understand what politics is about while closing one's eyes to what is important in it. The two contrasting views on politics and its notions present in philosophical discourse have their real anchor in the world of human experience and cannot be ignored or reduced to something else.

⁴ Cf. P. Śpiewak, “Alexis de Tocqueville i Hannah Arendt o Solidarności” [Alexis de Tocqueville and Hannah Arendt on Solidarity] *Res Publica* issue 5/1987, pp.83–88.

⁵ Arista Maria Cirtautas, *The Polish Solidarity Movement. Revolution, Democracy and Natural Rights*, Routledge 1997, from the back matter.

Arendt's conception – independently of her own conviction – belongs to ethical ideas. Politics is basically poli-ethics, a notion of ethical society which is the only one where there appears the experience of common responsibility and the debate over a particular realization of the common good. The political bond between equal and free individuals, which Arendt dreams about, can only function on the basis of durable and indisputable ethical foundations. The archetype of *isonomia* deprived of the ethical aura surrounding the Greek polis would immediately lose its whole grace. What is attractive in it is a *sui generis* equality characteristic of the community of friends, which Aristotle praised so much. Without a common ethical experience, without agreeing on elementary values, the debate of equal and free individuals will never be a friendly discussion and the words uttered will turn out to be daggers in a callous fight for power. A debate then becomes a polemic, that is – according to the Greek stem – a “warring debate,” and Arendt's categories are not of much use any more. There is a need for a different language which will be capable of expressing the fact that in the world of politics we are surrounded not only by friends but also by those who see us as enemies.

The lack of such a language seems to explain Arendt's helplessness against the phenomenon of totalitarianism, a helplessness which she openly admitted.⁶ Without serious reflection on the category of the enemy, the description of totalitarian systems will always be shallow and incomplete. It is important for us because only by capturing the essence of the communist version of totalitarianism, and especially of the project of community that communism tried to realize, will we be able to see, by means of radical contrast, the vision of community that revealed itself in the originary experience of solidarity.

III.

Let us begin by distinguishing between two basic opposing kinds of interpersonal bonds. Let us call them here the political bond and the ethical bond.⁷

The former type of bond is born with an awareness of a common enemy. What connects and integrates us comes from without. It does not matter who you are and who I am, it is not important whether we are similar, have the same problems, believe in similar values. The only thing that matters is that somebody who is nearby, who obviously endangers you and I, and whom we must fight to save ourselves. The content of our unity and identity, the source of force that integrates the community is our com-

⁶ Cf. H. Arendt, *Korzenie totalitaryzmu* [The Origins of Totalitarianism], Warszawa 1989, vol. 1, chap. 12, p. 348.

⁷ I fully realize that defining the political bond in opposition to the ethical bond must raise various objections, therefore, in order to avoid misunderstanding I am ready to substitute the term “political” with a different name that would better render the phenomenon that I am describing here.

mon enemy, some “Them,” utter strangers, but in a curious relationship to us, for without their presence our “Us” would not simply exist. Those two words – Us and Them – most concisely express the experience of this bond. This bond is based, first of all, on negation. In extreme cases, the sense of “Us” means only “not-Them.” 163

The sense of community that is evoked in us by our common adversary can obviously have various degrees of intensity. A trace of this bond appears already when we innocently gossip and talk behind the back of someone absent. We will find it in the form of an enormous destructive force in a mob that looks for a scapegoat to lynch. But its characteristic sphere seems to be the domain of politics understood as a strife to eliminate rivals in the fight for power. For that particular reason it might be called a political bond.⁸ This negative bond is not only an important element, and at times even the most important one, in the political identity of some group, but also serves all by itself as a tool of political action – the skill of mobilizing adherents and winning over allies by evoking suspicions and hostility toward political rivals belongs to the ABCs of effective politics.

On the other hand, the other type of bond, let us call it the ethical bond, has a totally different, positive character. It is a bond that defines our community, defines the sense of “Us,” not by means of a relation to someone strange and hostile, but from within: through commonly-held values. These common values can obviously vary from lower to higher ones, they can also be more or less deeply lived. The deepest and most intensively lived form of ethical community is the religious community – a community where members are joined by the highest, commonly-held values. The content of what a given community upholds as the highest and absolute values remains here the key issue.

Both types of social bonds – the political bonds based on a negation of an enemy and the ethical bonds built on a positive identification with some particular set of values – usually permeate each other and incessantly mix with each other in the real world. Members of political communities suddenly discover some greater link than the presence of a common adversary, whereas ethical communities, including religious ones, often take on qualities of political communities and their action, instead of springing from the commonly-held values, becomes a reaction to external – real or fictitious – danger.⁹ The actual overlapping of these two bonds does not, however, undermine the fundamental difference between them. What’s more, distinguishing the ethical bonds from the political ones enables us to undertake an analysis of those communities where one of the types of bonds almost completely dominates the other.

⁸ The perspective in which politics appears as a sphere where the force combining particular communities is an awareness of a common enemy I obviously owe to Carl Schmitt’s works and especially his classic *Der Begriff des Politischen*.

⁹ A matter worth further and distinct reflection is the manner of existence in the world of ethical and religious communities founded on such highest values that – through their universal character which excludes no one – on principle they rule out the possibility of appealing to political bonds based on the concept of enemy. The Christian call to “love your enemies” is a lucid testimony of the real presence of such a community.

164 Thanks to it, we can look at the experience of the community of the “First Solidarity” in a more sensible manner. This phenomenon burst the reality created within the framework of the PRL, for it constituted an extreme opposition to the social bonds formed and supported by the communist ideology and practice.

IV.

The experience of the solidarity community cannot be understood apart from its particular context. The environment in which it appeared and which it transformed was the social reality shaped by years of the communist rule.

The daily life of communism is one of omnipresent politics, the clearly-defined enemy that has to be fought – an external enemy as well as an internal one. The enemy works undercover, in practice anyone can be an enemy. To unmask the enemy a continuous vigilance, distrust and suspiciousness are needed. These cardinal virtues of the communist morality were infecting the society, destroying all ethical bonds. Every sustained internal obligation – and such are ethical relations – represented an obstacle in the formation of a perfectly obedient and pliable society. In the project of the communist political system there was no room for independent ethical communities whose action could be defined by the internal attachment to concrete and durable values. In practice they were tolerated as long as their action was limited to the private sphere, which communism anyway tried to diminish as much as possible. When these communities endeavored to act in the public sphere independently of the government, it immediately acknowledged them as enemies. A society controlled by communism – or more widely by totalitarianism, as in Nazism it was a similar case – is an example of a society where the domination of the political bonds over the ethical bonds has advanced as far as possible.

To get the right measure of the situation, it has to be admitted that on the threshold of August 1980 – first of all thanks to the survival and presence in social life of the great ethical community of the Church – Poland significantly fell short of the totalitarian ideal. One cannot overestimate the influence of the first pilgrimage of Pope John Paul II, thanks to which many future participants of the “Solidarity” movement first experienced powerfully that it is possible to be together without being against anyone and that this bond can bind millions. On the other hand, despite evident defeats, the idea of total eradication of any ethical bond incessantly informed the horizons of thinking of the communist government. Although the attempt to destroy the Church with force failed, weakening and diminishing its influence on society, as well as the annihilation of any centers of social life independent of the state, were the most important aims of the party and Security Service’s actions until the very fall of the system in 1989.

The essential sense of solidarity community is revealed to us only against the background of the totalitarian society project based on the political bonds and the image of the common enemy. First, from the very beginning the solidarity community was grounded in ethical values, and the deepest values at that. Second, the bond it was building was a phenomenon radically and programmatically apolitical.

The latter claim may provoke objections at first sight. Did the “Solidarity” movement not see itself as another uprising of Poles against the sovereignty of another empire? Was it not deeply anti-communist? Were the members of the PZPR¹⁰ apparatus not universally thought to be “paid traitors, Russia’s footmen”? Does all this not show that the image of the clearly-defined enemy took an important place in the minds of people involved in the “First Solidarity”? Certainly, it was often thought and said so. But on the level of the most crucial words – on the level of deeds – things looked quite different.

There was a universal agreement that the issue of government, here and now, was a taboo subject, the upper limit of all demands and reforms which could not be overstepped, since immediate questioning of the political monopoly of the PZPR would have brought on its coattails Moscow’s military intervention. In August 1980, the communist government agreed to give a free space for society to run; the limits of this space were not clearly set, however, it was known that the government had to remain in power. Recognizing this as an axiom prevented the social energy from being transformed into a political force and directed it to positive work: to taking over responsibility for the common home. As the result, the unquestionable political monopoly of the PZPR was becoming more and more empty, and the party almost totally lost influence over the lives of Poles.

What’s more, from the perspective of a society emancipating itself, the governing Communists had an unusually useful role – for the Moscow center they played the role of a façade testifying that Poland maintained its geopolitical *status quo*. For this reason, the communist government was believed to be not merely an evil, but an evil necessary under the given circumstances.¹¹ Although its whole ideological and pragmatic superstructure was met with universal rejection, its actual presence was accepted on the condition that it would be a minimal, non-expanding, presence. Consequently, the reviving society did not treat the government as a political enemy who needed to be destroyed, never waged war against it, and never looked for its own identity in negation. On the contrary, the government was ignored. People recognized the necessity of its existence

¹⁰ Polska Zjednoczona Partia Robotnicza – Polish United Workers’ Party, the governing party in Poland in the years 1948–1989.

¹¹ Due to this fact, the communist government attained some legitimacy like Hobbes’s Leviathan, only that in the society’s eyes the Behemoth that this government was to be a cure for, was not the state of anarchy but the power of the USSR.

166 and did nothing more. They turned their backs on the government and busied themselves with tidying up their home.

One needs to mention here all those who took on the burden of watching that the government stay within set limits: the union leaders, advisors, experts – participants of the never-ending disputes and negotiations with the representatives of the communist government. In a sense, those people whose names have been put into history textbooks forever, in comparison with the participants of the “First Solidarity,” had, by far, a more difficult access to its originary experience. Since the very beginning they were forcefully torn away from it. Lied to, misled, divided into better and worse, those people were taught a lesson of political thinking by the communist negotiators. However, it is thanks to them that the principle of a self-limiting – that is ethical and not political – revolution was successfully maintained in Poland for several months. This axiom created for sometime a unique space in which the miracle of Solidarity could appear – the miracle of forming and developing an unusual ethical community.

VI.

The special character of the solidarity community lay, above all, in the fact that it was founded on the highest values, absolute values. It needs to be said very clearly: the deepest sense of the experience of the “First Solidarity” will be unveiled for us only if we comprehend it as the experience of a bond and community so deep and so intensely lived that it must simply be called a religious bond. It is not negated by the fact that many people who were not in the Church then, nor are they there now, participated authentically and with full commitment in the “Solidarity” movement and its community experience. It is not negated – but rather confirmed – by the fact that many members of the Church referred to the new community in an at least distrustful manner. The thing is that the language in which this deep bond was expressed was not a language of any particular denomination, but the language of ethics. The simplest words and the simplest values connected us: freedom, truth, dignity, justice.

The essentially religious character of this community is testified by the fact that the time of the “First Solidarity” is the time of mass conversions. However, those conversions were not only returns to God and the Church. What happened then was something far greater. At that time, both atheists and practicing Catholics converted, that is, completely changed their lives. There are many such atheists or agnostics among us who raised their heads back then and stopped fearing and having decided to live with dignity and without false compromises threw away their party IDs and other chains of slavery and falsehood. Many of them have sustained their decisions, though often their connection with the visible Church is even more distant than it was 20 years ago. God-fearing Catholics converted too, including some priests who only thanks to the

Solidarity community saw that their hearts had grown cold and that they ¹⁶⁷ remained sensitive only to the matters of their own gardens or vestries, that they adhered too easily to the old Polish saying about serving two masters: *A candle for God, a taper for the devil.*

What did all those atheists, agnostics, lukewarm and fervent Christians convert to? What was the religion that connected them all? What absolute values was the solidarity community grounded in? I can here only repeat the words of Fr. Józef Tischner, “Solidarity is a spontaneously created community of people of goodwill. The deepest solidarity is the solidarity of consciences.” The experience of the “First Solidarity” is the experience of all those who saw that one can live in accord with one’s own conscience and decided to live so. It was a time when people such as they were, weak and lost, felt that they could be better and consciously desired it. It was the experience of the special “time of grace,” “sacred time,” an experience of being incredibly “lifted up,” the hearing of some call to surpass themselves. At the same time there was a sense that in this call to choose to live according to one’s conscience we were not alone – there was a deep sense of community and trust toward other people, who were just like us, who desired to live with dignity.

No wonder that this existing community of people of goodwill remained, for a long time, untouched by bonds of the negative kind. Liberated, thanks to recognizing the political monopoly of the PZPR as an axiom, from the temptation of moving into the hostile terrain of the strife for power, it focused on the positive work of restoring sense to the remaining dimensions of social space. The solidarity community did not acknowledge anyone as an enemy, which was proved by the fact that it was open to everyone who wished to participate in it. Everyone who wanted to have a conscience, regardless of his background, could become its member. The time of the “First Solidarity” was a period of effective “new beginnings,” a time of absolving faults and of the preeminence of mercy over justice.¹² The past sins of ex-opportunists – and almost everyone was to be counted as such – their abuses, trespasses and weaknesses, though surely not crimes, had no meaning in the circle of those who resolved to live truly as people of conscience.

The experience of the special bond of the “First Solidarity” is so extraordinary that, searching for historical analogies, only the experience of the first Christian communities of the first three centuries comes to mind. First, we find in them a similar lack of thinking in political terms. In both cases, the problem of power did not play an essential role. It was not treated as something worth gaining. Nor was the government seen as an enemy that one had to prepare to fight, but as a necessity that had to be accepted, paying the due tribute and nothing more. Second, one is

¹² The policy of new beginnings was summed up in the expression *gruba kreska* (thick line), a term introduced by Tadeusz Mazowiecki, the first non-communist prime minister, meaning a policy that would break with the past. “We draw a thick line on what has happened in the past,” he said in his first parliamentary speech. Later the term was understood as the policy of non-punishment for the offenses committed before 1989 [trans.].

168 struck by the similarity of unusual intensity with which the bond was experienced, a bond fostered on the grounds of deep personal conversions. Third, the very content of the “Solidarity” movement’s message – dignity, justice and finally solidarity itself, a sense of brotherly connection with others – does not go beyond what is in the Christian faith, even though it is expressed in a supra-denominational language of universal values, which is comprehensible to every person. Fourth, it is difficult not to see – keeping the right proportions – the similarity of behavior in the time of ordeal. When the period of persecution came, the resistance to those in power, who resolved to use violence in order to destroy the community, basically did not go beyond passive resistance. The logic of fighting the enemy did not displace and replace values lying at the foundations of the solidarity community. These values were confirmed, though faithfulness to them required heroism and sometimes even martyrdom.

VII.

The imposition of Martial Law finally closed the extraordinary space in which the ethical community of people of goodwill could flourish. The forgotten and ignored government reminded everyone that it is not some kind of façade. It broke back into the social sphere and, according to its logic, immediately took to obliterating any ethical bonds that were formed at the time of the “First Solidarity.” When the shock of surprise was over, those for whom a betrayal offer – proposed in a wide range by Jaruzelski’s regime – was unacceptable as a matter of principle faced the dilemma of “what next?” In the situation when the possibility to form social institutions was almost totally eliminated, for those who still wanted to live according to the solidarity ethos two ways remained open. The first one, which was followed by the majority of the society, involved coming to terms with the facts, withdrawing from the public sphere into catacombs and looking after the community on the elementary level. Its principal expression was universal help for those in need, imprisoned or persecuted.

The second way was followed by people who deemed normal life impossible so long as the Communists ruled. In other words, they admitted that politics is in a sense more important than ethics. Under their influence, the “Solidarity” movement adopted the idea of political strife. Since the Martial Law, the category characteristic of the community war appears with a special sharpness: “Us – Them.” Not long ago open to all, even to the members of the PZPR, the solidarity community now naturally closed its ranks when facing danger and persecutions. Whoever did not then throw away his party ID, whoever sided in this or that unambiguous manner with the ruling junta obviously became a man without conscience, a man of ill-will, in the eyes of those participating in the “people-of-conscience community.” One cannot understand the sharpness of the divisions which have lasted until now or heal them without being aware how deeply they go.

The 80's is a process of gradually forgetting about the ethical experience of the "First Solidarity" and superseding it with fresher and more intense experiences of a community at war. It was all the more true, as the shape of the "second Solidarity" was being informed by a new generation, who associated the experience of participation with street fights with the ZOMO,¹³ strikes, conspiracy. The society, infected by Communists with their typical thinking within enemy categories, became distrustful and suspicious also toward itself, and thereby more and more divided. Only for short periods the Pope's pilgrimages recreated the old familiar and miraculous space where the government, though powerful, meant little, and the dejected threatened crowds turned into a fearless and benevolent solidarity community.

When Poland won back its independence in 1989 it soon turned out that, despite the fact that the shape of the new reality was being forged under the banner of "Solidarity," it had little to do with the ideal born twenty years before. The expectation that the experience of the "First Solidarity" would be repeated and that our society – this time under the rule of people of conscience – would become an ethical community again was starkly unfulfilled. What's more, mutual accusations and conflicts which made old friends become worst enemies, worse even than Communists, revealed such deep divisions that a question presented itself as crucial: "Was the image of the 'First Solidarity' as an ethical community of people of goodwill not fictitious?"

VIII.

Indeed, it is not difficult to understand those who, with a deep sense of disappointment, answered this question positively and suppressed as illusory the most valuable memories from twenty years before. I believe, however, that this disappointment turned out inevitable not because the miraculous community of the "First Solidarity" never really existed, but because it was truly miraculous, because miracles hardly ever happen. We should not indulge in illusions. The building of a pure ethical community which lacks political bonds and encompasses the majority of society is even more improbable in a democracy than in a, more or less, totalitarian system.

Democracy as a political system is in its essence an arena of incessant fighting, in which the category of the enemy who must be defeated plays the fundamental role. Contemporary democracy, understood as the play for power, differs from totalitarianism only in the fact that it is not about the physical elimination of the opponent – the whole structure of the state of law is grounded in human rights thus it opposes it and creates an unquestionable framework for political competition. So, politics is about eliminating the opponent from the play by the means of, for instance, the

¹³ Zmotoryzowane Oddziały Milicji Obywatelskiej – Motorized Units of Civil Militia, a paramilitary riot police unit during the communist period [trans.].

170 marginalization of rival parties and removing them from the political scene.¹⁴ In the fighting space, where divisions override connections, there will never be a universal community of people of goodwill, but a political community which needs an enemy to derive its identity from. We can also be quite sure that “solidarity” as a political slogan differentiating one faction from others will be a mere caricature of its primordial ethical sense.

However, it does not mean that nothing can be saved from the ethical experience of the “First Solidarity.” Although the democratic political system is in essence permeated by the spirit of division and the logic of democratic political competition has totalitarian tendencies and strives to subordinate all spheres of social life to itself, fortunately, the democratic state allows for more ways of positive action than totalitarianism. Instead of waiting in vain for the fulfillment of hope – a hope similar to the idea of squaring the circle – that a universal ethical community can be re-created all at once with the methods of political fight, it is better to look at more modest but concrete possibilities.

Even in a totalitarian system, if its real shape falls only just a bit short of its theoretical ideal, and all the more in a democratic state, organic work is possible – building of small communities of ordinary inter-human solidarity. We should secure the best conditions conducive to the calm growth of such communities and allow them to encompass ever greater groups of people. The basic condition – we know about it thanks to the experience of the “First Solidarity” – is the cleansing of our everyday life from the pressures of political conflicts. Wherever it is possible politics should be ignored, that is, in the spheres autonomous of conflicts for power, in learning, culture, art, and all others, their own measures and categories should be used. In opposition to the times not many years ago, this attitude does not involve punitive repression nor harassment of the powers that be, and does not require heroic courage but a common sense of decency and a pinch of non-conformism.

This postulate of depoliticizing the public space, which anyway is treated as standard and realized in all spheres of social life by people of goodwill, constitutes a minimal program which can be completed with something far more difficult, though perfectly feasible.

It is possible to partly depoliticize the sphere of politics itself, understood as all that is connected to the functioning of the state and its institutions. It should be underscored that politics seen as the strife for power, whose subjects are political parties and which revolves around the Parliament, is only a certain, not even the most important, dimension of the contemporary democratic law-observing state. Indeed, party activists, as the immediate participants of the competition, have a tendency to perceive all the aspects of public life within the categories of politics understood

¹⁴ We could illustrate it with a metaphor. Although the practice of the classic wrestling differs significantly from the all-in wrestling, they share the same passion – a need for fight, and some holds seem quite alike. Perhaps it is here that one should look for the reasons of the surprising successes of the post-Communist formation on the democratic arena – they have been trained in similar wrestling for years.

in this way. Actually, it is a frivolous claim. There are more fundamental meta-political institutions of the state which limit and rein in the arena of political competition. In short, they are the institutions guarding elementary human rights (of personal security and freedom of action) and the discussed and universally accepted procedures including the rules of political action (consisting of civil rights, election ordinance, etc.).¹⁷¹

Whether these clear limits have been precisely established in reality or are flexible and permissive is reflected in the constitutional order which is in force in a given country. It is easily noticeable that the Polish constitution of 1997 – passed mainly by post-communist votes but in full harmony with the preferences of the whole “supra-party caste of professional politicians” – leaves too much room for the sphere of political strife and, to make matters worse, allows for its constant growth, all within the constitutional order. In this context, there is an essential need for a deep reform of the state concerning its foundations and involving constitutional changes that will clearly limit politics understood as strife for power. This task seems almost unfeasible as it requires support on the part of active politicians, that is, it demands self-limitation from those whose participation in the political competition constitutes their ruling passion and main aim in life. Or it requires the rise of new groups bound with ethical bonds so strong as not to submit to the logic of politics and supported widely enough to force impenetrable barriers on the political sphere. Although both requirements seem now to be purely theoretical possibilities, the experience of the “First Solidarity” reminds us that similar miracles have happened in human history.