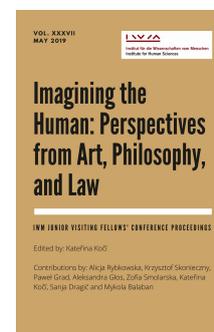


Introduction

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The Junior Fellows' Conference at the IWM entitled “Imagining the Human: Perspectives from Art, Philosophy, and Law” was held on May 16, 2019. This year is the 30th anniversary of the *beginning of the end* of the communist regime in Central and Eastern Europe. Incidentally, it is noteworthy that this year the IWM — a world-famous place where East and West meet — hosts all the Junior Fellows from this corner of the world. Moreover, as the perceptive reader will notice, most of the fellows this semester come from Poland as if they were paying a tribute to one of the founding fathers and the first rector of the Institute, the Polish philosopher Krzysztof Michalski.

The conference took place in two time slots offering the main speakers 15 minutes for presentation, 5 minutes for response followed by a general discussion. Both the speakers and other participants of the conference benefited from the eloquent and highly informed responses given by the senior scholars, either permanent fellows to the IWM, such as Ludger Hagedorn, Ivan Krastev, or Miloš Vec, or senior visiting fellows, such as Luiza Bialasiewicz, Aishwary Kumar, Anastacia Ryabchuk, or Marci Shore. The conference was both opened and closed by Miloš Vec who in his address highlighted the unique character and atmosphere of the Institute which became for the time being our intellectual home. Sharing similar socio-political and historical contexts but coming from different academic backgrounds, the Junior Fellows aimed at presenting their papers touching the question of what it means to be human. Most of the perspectives were philosophical, some artistic or the combination of the two, some from the field of political theory, or law.

Alicja Rybkowska was seeking for the philosophical roots of the avant-garde in fine arts. Presenting a whole range of influential philosophers of the 19th and 20th century, including Hegel, Schopenhauer, or Nietzsche, Alicja was looking for intellectual hints and a both ways influence between philosophy and fine art. Her creed which led her whole doctoral project and was presented in her contribution was “the inner star of spirit” that is shared by both the philosophers and the artists and which is ultimately accessible to whole humanity.

Krzysztof Skonieczny gave us a foretaste of his larger project on political imagination. He offered an alternative to the usual materialist logic of philosophical reflections on social changes by bringing in the concept of imagination. This concept plays with the idea of foreseeing future conducts of the society and thus also produce a pro-active, rather than reactive, approach. Krzysztof was asking whether Martha Nussbaum by putting forward realist novels as a form of desired formation of humanity is offering a plausible path for the model of political imagination.

Paweł Grad in his presentation delienated two traditions of semantics of religious language. By offering examples of realist and antirealist semantics, Paweł argued against Jürgen Habermas that religious language is a part of the so-called 'natural language' (shared by everyone) and should be understandable even outside the religious community. Thus, believing people, Paweł believes, should not be deprived of their right to universal truth-claims about their faith which must be accessible to all the humanity.

Aleksandra Głos asked a question how to establish and maintain decent society. Decency is, Aleksandra believes, not an abstract philosophical category but a sum of 'minimum' to preserve human dignity. Special challenges to trust, Aleksandra points out, are present in post-communist countries, such as Czech Republic or Poland, where the official representation of the state has kept a long tradition of humiliating its citizens. Based on Jane Mansbridge's altruistic concept, Aleksandra puts forward several paths towards establishing the bound of trust, which conditions the decent society.

Zofia Smolarska presented her paper on the socio-political shift of the state of theater craftspeople in Poland. The socio-economic changes after the political transformation in 1989 brought dramatic savings to theatre and the whole world around, including the theater craftspeople. Zofia based on her fieldwork which she compared to Józef Tischner's "Philosophy of Solidarność" argues that what people need most, regardless of their rung on the social ladder, is to be listened to, cared for, and treated with respect.

Kateřina Kočí in this jubilee year devoted her presentation to interpretation of a violent death of Milada Horáková through the lens of sacrifice. Horáková was a Czech political prisoner and a victim of political showtrials of 1950s Czechoslovakia. On the example of Horáková's case, Katerina's presentation puts forward two rival approaches to sacrifice offered by René Girard and Jan Patočka. Following Horáková's case, Katerina argues, that these interpretations are not in fact rival but rather complementary.

Sanja Dragić clarified the term of 'human rights backlash' currently bountifully used in international politics and law. Sanja, by giving several examples from international law, demonstrates that the human rights backlash happens on different levels of the state-apparatus which means that it also takes different shapes. Yet, by brining variety of different forms into one theoretical concept might be better equipped to understand the concept as a whole and ultimately create more just global structure.

Mykola Balaban presented his interpretation of the intensive massacres that took place at the turn of June and July 1941 in Lviv (Ukraine). Mykola in his account points out that the existing scholarship suffers from fragmentation of the complex picture of violence

which is given by the different interests of the researching parties. Only when we see the interconnectedness of the Nazi, Soviet and Ukrainian violence against the people of Lviv can we understand and interpret this extraordinarily intensive massacre of different socio-cultural and national groups in this city.