



## Introduction to the issue

### Polish liberal thought

Polish liberal thought is the leading theme in this issue of *Argument: Biannual Philosophical Journal*. We wanted to discern and to specify the Polish route to liberalism, to reveal the social and cultural foundation on which the methodical transformation of the whole political system was carried out in Poland after 1989. The liberal character of these reforms is not in doubt; but what is less clear are the factors that led to the success of these reforms. If we assume that political ideas are an integral part of the spiritual life of a nation, then it seems impossible for any ideas to take hold — in this case liberal ideas — that stand against native traditions. Hence, the authors of the first three articles examine the constituent parts of liberalism with regard to Polish culture and tradition. Miłowit Kuniński describes the intellectual struggles with communism of Stefan Kisielewski; Miłosz Puczydłowski analyses the contribution of Catholic intellectuals to the liberal tradition, connected with the monthly *Znak*; and Szymon Bródka reveals the early beginnings of the Christian liberal environment, and especially the conceptual and organisational ideals of its leader, Mirosław Dzielski.

The debate around the retreat of liberal ideas in contemporary Poland was another topic we set ourselves to address. The current ideological and political situation generates a wide range of questions: To what extent are the current events a result of our unique historical experience, and to what extent are they the elements of a wider climatic change occurring in global politics? Is the liberal democratic project now exhausted? Have liberal ideas lost the power of inspiration, and are they no longer able to block the constitutional decomposition, or to stop social claims and the growing tendency to rely on violence? Two articles in this issue are devoted to these problems. Janusz A. Majcherek analyses the disconnection between democracy and liberalism, and the different ways in which this disconnection is leading us to adopt new types

of democratic systems. With reference to the Polish philosopher Aleksander Trzaska Chrzęszczewski, Piotr Bartula develops a historical view of the inevitable tidal fluctuations of ideologies, as well as the inevitable rise and fall of liberal ideas.

We also wanted to explore some of the current social and political problems connected with the present liberalism debates, and we were interested in making both a diagnosis and a prognosis. The first question concerns the problem of taking responsibility for the current events and the economic policies of past governing administrations. Secondly, we have to ask whether we are dealing with a short term reaction among certain social groups to the high costs of constitutional transformations, after which Poland will return to being a law-abiding society with respect for the liberal-democratic order; or are we perhaps witnessing the emergence of a new social and political system, and a long term decline of liberal ideas in this part of Europe. Two debates and one lecture included in this issue provide some answers to these questions. The debate between Marcin Król and Aleksander Smolar brings the liberals to account for the mistakes committed during the constitutional transformation. Similarly, the debate between Janusz A. Majcherek and Andrzej Szachaj holds the liberals accountable for their intellectual mind-set, and ask whether they are ready for new kinds of challenges. Furthermore, in his lecture, Andrzej Wańkiewicz deals with the similarities among two seemingly very different historical processes in contemporary Poland: the liberal transformation of the nineties; and the current retreat from liberalism.

We wanted to keep a monographic character in this issue of *Argument*. Hence, in the review section we have three articles devoted to three new books that are very important to the current debate around liberalism in Poland. These are: Beata Polanowska-Sygułska, *John Gray i krytyka liberalnego legalizmu* [John Gray and the critique of liberal legalism] (reviewed by Paweł Kłoczowski); Maciej Gdula, *Nowy autorytaryzm* [New authoritarianism] (reviewed by Katarzyna Haremska); and Jan Zielonka, *Kontrrewolucja. Liberalna Europa w odwróceniu* [Counter-revolution: Liberal Europe in retreat] (reviewed by Anna Szklarska). The reviews edited by Tomasz Borycki also note four of the most commented books on the subject of the liberal retreat: Fareed Zakaria, *Przyszłość wolności. Nieliberalna demokracja w Stanach Zjednoczonych i na świecie* [The future of freedom: Illiberal democracy at home and abroad]; Mark Lilla, *Koniec liberalizmu jak i znamy. Requiem dla polityki tożsamości* [The once and future liberal: After identity politics]; George Lakoff, *Moralna polityka. Jak myślą liberałowie i konserwatyści* [Moral politics: How liberals and conservatives think]; and Janusz Grygieńć and Colin Tyler (ed.), *Nowy liberalizm. Wybór tekstów* [New liberalism. An anthology]. In the report section, we have coverage of the conference *Polska myśl liberalna — tradycja i współczesność* [Polish Liberal Thought — Tradition and Contemporaneity] (Kraków 2017), and the

debate *Koniec liberalnej demokracji* [The End of Liberal Democracy] (Kraków 2018). In addition to the above, we have three items that are not connected with the main theme of the issue: a review essay by Grzegorz Trela, *Język filozoficznie odczarowany. O "Przewodniku po filozofii języka"* [The Philosophical language disenchanting — A Guide to the Philosophy of Language]; an essay in the "Teaching Philosophy" section by Barbara Wąsik, *Dziecko filozofem. O projekcie edukacyjnym "FiloZosia — filozofia dla przedszkolaków"* [The Child as a Philosopher — An Educational Project for Kindergarten Children]; and an essay in the "PhilosOFFer's Lense" section by Andrzej Coryell, *Gdyby Bóg istniał...* [If God existed...].

We wish you pleasant and inspiring reading,

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Editors of the issue

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