

AGATA KAŁABUNOWSKA  
Poznań  
ORCID: 0000-0002-2793-7691

## **“A refreshing history lesson?” On the Polish edition of Theodor Adorno’s lecture**

Theodor W. Adorno, *Nowy prawicowy radykalizm. Wykład o jego kilku aspektach* [English title: *Aspects of the New Right-Wing Extremism*], afterword by Volker Weiss, translated by Mikołaj Ratajczak, Wydawnictwo Znak, Krakow 2020, 112 pp.

Despite the fact that research on the subject of political radicalism and extremism and the problems that these phenomena pose for the condition of liberal democracy is one of the most dynamically developing fields of political science, it is not often that we come across new publications on these issues on the Polish publishing market. Research results are being increasingly published in academic papers, which are short and dwell upon selected aspects of the phenomena in question. English-language monographs, written in specialist language and offering a great amount of detail, are becoming more readily available; yet since they are aimed at a narrow audience, even the most seminal works on these issues are hardly ever translated into Polish. However, as the existence of extreme tendencies in politics cannot be denied and their intensification may cause concern, a 2020 Znak publication, *Nowy prawicowy radykalizm. Wykład o jego kilku aspektach* [English title: *Aspects of the New Right-Wing Extremism*] is likely to generate interest. The book, which is just 112 pages long, is authored by Theodor Adorno, “the greatest intellectual of post-modern Germany” (Moldenhauer 2019), and translated by Mikołaj Ratajczak.

It would be an overstatement to say that the present text is a review of Adorno’s lecture, for at least two reasons. Firstly, the views of the German philosopher and sociologist have already been the subject of numerous studies. Secondly, it would be inappropriate to review a publication whose author (who died over 50 years ago) cannot address the comments raised in a review. Thus,

it should be emphasised that the present contribution is designed to critically refer to the 2020 edition of Adorno's lecture by the Znak publishing house, rather than to the German philosopher's views. It should be added that this is the first Polish edition of *Aspects of the New Right-Wing Extremism*, promoted as "a must-have of the engaged citizen" and a "frighteningly timely" and "refreshing history lesson". The focus will thus be on whether it is really possible and worthwhile to blindly apply Adorno's words to the surrounding reality, as the publisher's marketing message would suggest.

It should sadly be noted that the Znak publishing house chose not to publish an introduction or an afterword by any of the Polish researchers of radical thought and movements. The 2020 Polish edition of *Aspects of the New Right-Wing Extremism* ends with an afterword by Volker Weiss, as does the 2020 German edition of this lecture by Suhrkamp Verlag.<sup>1</sup> The community of Polish researchers of radicalism and extremism is not large; however, such scholars as Marek Maciejewski, Adam Hołub, Roman Bäcker, Aleksandra Moroska-Bonkiewicz or Olgierd Grott could potentially have provided some insight into Adorno's lecture to Polish readers.

With regard to the lack of introduction in *Aspects of the New Right-Wing Extremism*, it is worthwhile analysing the structure of this publication. It begins with the content of the lecture itself, which is then followed by an editor's note on page 51 informing the readers that Adorno delivered the lecture in question 1967 in Vienna at the invitation of the Socialist Students of Austria. What follows then is an afterword, a note about the authors and a glossary of terms (both personal, e.g., Joseph Goebbels or Max Horkheimer, and factual, e.g., Fordism, Landtag or Weimar Republic). To explain the paradox of this structure, let us view the content of the lecture. In it, Adorno emphasises at the outset that his speech is intended to present loose thoughts on right-wing radicalism, rather than a coherent theory of this phenomenon. He goes on to say that he will be striving to "add a little to what is generally thought and known about these matters" (p. 4)<sup>2</sup>. The fact that the reader of the Polish edition is deprived of an adequate introduction and that the editor's note is placed after the lecture, not before it, leads to two misunderstandings at the very begin-

<sup>1</sup> This was also the first edition of the lecture published in Germany. It was previously available only in the Austrian Mediatheque's resources in an audio form. The publication of *Aspekte des neuen Rechtsradikalismus. Ein Vortrag* has received a great deal of publicity in Germany (cf., e.g., Lux, Mettin 2019, Moldenhauer 2019, Rabe 2019, Schadt 2019, Husi n.d., Dietschreit 2020).

<sup>2</sup> Direct quotations from Adorno in this article are from the English language edition of the work.

ning of the lecture that affect further reception of the text. On the one hand, unacquainted with Adorno’s biography and works, the reader is “thrown” into the lecture hall by the publisher, unaware that they are listening to a speech that was actually delivered over 50 years ago. On the other hand, by proposing this kind of structure, the publisher assumes that the reader already has some background knowledge of the issue and that “what is commonly believed about these issues” constitutes a pool of knowledge, staying the same for Adorno in 1967 and for a Polish reader in 2020.

This is the reality in which the German philosopher delivered his lecture that is central to a proper interpretation of the entire argument. That reality is distinctly different from the state of affairs present to the XXI century reader. While it is hard to deny that Adorno’s assertions were valid and insightful, one should be aware of the historical factors that prevent the direct application of his arguments, conclusions and recommendations in the present day. Let us elaborate on these historical factors. The 1960s saw, on the one hand, significant changes on the West German political scene, and on the other hand, transformations in the way people reflected upon and spoke out on political radicalism *per se*. When Adorno delivered his lecture in Vienna, the National Democratic Party of Germany (*Nationaldemokratische Partei Deutschlands*, *NPD*) had existed for only three years. Its presence on the political scene somewhat challenged the belief that Germans had got to grips with political radicalism, understood in the postwar years primarily as a manifestation of nostalgia for the Nazi regime.

Between the end of World War II and the NPD’s political successes, activities by far-right organisations were sporadic rather than persistent and there was no follow-through. This was largely due to the strict regulations that were in force in all the occupation zones. The best-known exception to this rule was the activity of the Socialist Reich Party (*Sozialistische Reichspartei*, *SRP*) in 1949-1952.<sup>3</sup> This openly neo-Nazi and antisemitic party managed to win 11% of the vote in the Lower Saxony Landtag elections, and 7.7% of the vote in the elections to the city council of Bremen in October 1951. The *SRP* was outlawed pursuant to the first ruling in post-war Germany to ban a political party because the views it spread were deemed unconstitutional.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Besides the *SRP*, there were other political far-right groups that were active in that period such as *Deutsche Konservative Partei – Deutsche Rechtspartei (DKP-DRP)* in the years 1946-1950, *Deutsche Gemeinschaft (DG)* in 1949-1965 or *Deutsche Reichspartei (DRP)* in 1950-1965.

<sup>4</sup> Only two parties have been banned nationwide. The other party to be outlawed was the far-left Communist Party of Germany (*Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands*, *KPD*). It should

From the perspective of reflections on political extremism, the Federal Constitutional Court ruling to dissolve the *SRP* was of paramount importance as it defined for the first time the concept of a free democratic constitutional order (*die freiheitliche demokratische Grundordnung*). The precise explanation of this term was key to the effective functioning of the legal system under which, to this day, all efforts that threaten or question this free democratic order are considered unconstitutional.<sup>5</sup> At the beginning of his lecture, Adorno states that he is referring his thoughts primarily to the situation in West Germany. It should thus be remembered that he had in mind a relatively young democracy – a country with the Basic Law in place for only 18 years and with a legal system, which – as the Constitutional Court ruling showed – still needed to clarify individual provisions.

Successive far-right organisations later in the 1950s did not come close to the *SRP*'s electoral results, which researchers quite unanimously attribute to the “integrating influence” of Konrad Adenauer’s government on the German political scene (Pfahl-Traughber 2018: 309).<sup>6</sup> However, there were intellectual and cultural groups associated with extreme right-wing thought. It was not until the mid-1960s that a kind of deadlock on the “far-right” edge of the West German political scene was broken by the emergence of the *NPD*. The reasons for its successes can be attributed, among other things, to the party’s break with strictly neo-Nazi rhetoric and its acceptance – at least at the declarative level – of the democratic rules of the game (Pfahl-Traughber 2001: 77). According to historians and political scientists researching this period, the new formation aimed to move beyond the role of a fundamentalist opposition party (cf., e.g., Botsch 2016:50). Its political successes also resulted from social uncertainties associated with the first major postwar economic downturn. The *NPD* rapidly increased the number of its activists and by the late 1960s, it had approximately 25,000 members (Braun 2007: 342), and – according to other sources – even 30,000 active members (Flemming 2003: 160).

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be remembered that bans on political parties and non-party organisations can also be issued at the state (*Land*) level. Such bans are imposed much more frequently.

<sup>5</sup> It is worth noting that proceedings leading to the ban of *Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands* were also an opportunity to further clarify the regulations and terminology. It was stipulated that in order for a party to be banned, it must not only undermine the principles of the free democratic order, but additionally demonstrate an actively militant and aggressive approach, as well as harm the functioning of this order in a planned manner.

<sup>6</sup> Naturally, there were other reasons, including the decreased appeal of radical demands or the impact of the trials of Nazi criminals on public opinion (cf., e.g., Stöss 1989: 96-176).

By the time Adorno delivered his lecture in April 1967, the *NPD* had already sent its delegates to the Landtag of Bavaria (having won 7.4% of the vote there in the November 1966 elections) and Hesse (7.9% of the vote also in November 1966). It was soon to bring its representatives to the state assemblies of Rhineland-Palatinate (6.9% of the vote in April 1967), Schleswig-Holstein (5.8% in April 1967), Lower Saxony (7% in June 1967) and Bremen (8.8% in October 1967). The following year, the party achieved its best result in municipal elections with 9.8% of the vote in Baden-Württemberg, and tried its hand at the Bundestag elections as early as 1969. However, it fell short by 0.7% of the vote and that electoral defeat contributed to a prolonged crisis within the party, which is nonetheless still active today. Given such rapid growth of the *NPD* in the latter 1960s, Adorno cannot be accused of exaggeration, when – referring to his 1959 lecture *The Meaning of Working through the Past* – he stated that right-wing radicalism “was not yet truly visible at the time” (p. 4). It may have been because of the analogy between the *NPD*’s unexpectedly large successes and the current Alternative for Germany (*AfD*) party that the publication of this lecture has been met with such an enthusiastic reception in Germany. A few years ago, the *AfD*’s presence in political life (the party was established in 2013), let alone in the *Bundestag* (the *AfD* has had parliamentary representation since 2017), seemed equally unlikely.

Besides the events on the political scene, the second element that influenced Adorno’s method of argument is the state of knowledge of radical political views at the time. What needs to be indicated here are primarily terminological issues, which – unlike today<sup>7</sup> – did not pose so many problems. In his lecture, Adorno consistently uses the concept of “right-wing radicalism” (*Rechtsradikalismus*), which was at the time the predominant term to describe the phenomenon in question. Information on this topic is provided by a number of German publications on the history of and research on radical thought, including the work of Uwe Backes, in which the author traces the history of the concept of extremism from ancient times to the present day (Backes 2006). While before World War II, the term “extremism” was rarely used in the humanities and social sciences, it began to come to the fore in the 1950s, mainly through publications by American scholars, Edward Shils and Seymour Martin, which

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<sup>7</sup> One of the most recent overviews of terms relating to the “far” right has been published by C-REX – Center for Research on Extremism, based at the University of Oslo (Jupskås, Leidig 2020). The terms are also systematised, among others, by Kai Arzheimer (c.f. Arzheimer 2018), who maintains an interactive and constantly updated bibliography of research on issues of the far right, which contains over 900 publications (*The Eclectic, Erratic Bibliography*... n.d.).

were also popular in Europe. Backes notes, however, that even though in 1960s Germany, the concept of extremism was gaining ground, the concept of radicalism still prevailed (Backes 1989: 63).

Apart from the prevalence of the term “radicalism” among commentators on the social and political life of the time, Adorno’s choice of that term may have been further influenced by the practices of the security services and state administration at the time. In the early 1960s, they released, for the first time, documents that were the prototype of *Verfassungsschutzberichte*, i.e. annual reports published by the Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution on the state of the protection of democracy.<sup>8</sup> The 1962 report referred directly to “right-wing radicalism in the Federal Republic”; however, in both this and subsequent documents the terms “extremism” and “radicalism” were used interchangeably and inconsistently (Backes 2006: 193-196). A change did not occur until 1973. Since then, reports on the state of democracy protection – both at the federal level and at the level of individual German states – have referred only to “extremism”. Thus, we will find in them the term *Rechtsextremismus* to describe right-wing extremism and *Linksextremismus* to describe left-wing extremism.

Hence, it was not until the 1970s that a fairly stable consensus emerged, under which the term *extremist* is attributed to those organisations in Germany whose activities run counter to the principles of the free democratic constitutional order (they are considered *verfassungswidrig* – unconstitutional or anti-constitutional). By contrast the term *radical* is used to refer to those organisations whose criticism of the constitutional order is still within the spectrum of the views and behaviours compatible with the constitution (they are considered *verfassungskritisch* – critical of the constitution, but at the same time *verfassungsgemäß* – in accordance with the constitution) (Virchow 2016: 14). This change in terminology was meant to emphasise the possibility of criticising the constitutional system as long as its principles are not being undermined (Backes 2006: 197-200). Such a “terminological consensus” exists in Germany to date although it is known that for the purposes of constitutional protection, it is followed much more rigorously than for the purposes of public and aca-

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<sup>8</sup> The Office was established in 1950, but its activities were initially treated in strictly intelligence terms. The information acquired by the Office was primarily used to inform the authorities about potential threats to the democratic system. The reason for making the first report public in 1960 was a series of anti-Semitic incidents that occurred in the winter of late 1959 and early 1960 (the so-called *antisemitische Schmierwelle*). The first report, published in German and English, addressed precisely the issue of anti-Semitism (Backes 2006: 194).

demic debate.<sup>9</sup> However, these days there is no doubt that from an individual perspective or a perspective of a political group, the accusation being a right-wing extremist is far more serious than the accusation of being a right-wing radical. Extremism, as pointed out by Adam Hołub, goes much further at the level of ideas and goals. It is not just that it calls for substantial changes to the system, leaving it in its basic framework, but it seeks to change it completely for another. Radicalism postulates a considerable modification of the political system whereas extremism rejects it in its entirety (Hołub 2016: 28).

In the context of these subtle but important differences, it is worth emphasising that Adorno uses the term “right-wing radicalism” in his lecture as a standard term in his time. It is therefore important to note that the term has been meticulously rendered in the Polish translation (*nowy prawicowy radykalizm*), and emphasise that this is not a typical approach. In the English translation, for example, published in the American and British markets by Polity also in 2020, the title of the lecture is *Aspects of the New Right-Wing Extremism*, and so – erroneously – the key term that is employed throughout this edition is right-wing extremism.<sup>10</sup> For contemporary researchers of the “far” right, having at their disposal many terms (“far right”, “right-wing extremism”, “right-wing radicalism”, “new right”, “new populist right”, “populist right”, “neo-Nazi right”, etc.), which are constantly being debated and revised (cf., Rydgren 2017, Arzheimer 2018), the choice of the term “right-wing radicalism” may be puzzling; nevertheless, it is worth remembering that Adorno did not in fact have such a large choice. It would also be a mistake to assume that his text refers to all of these forms as we know them today, or that we can substitute any term from the array of terms available to us today for the term right-wing radicalism that he used. As a matter of fact, the German far-right scene in the 1960s was not

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<sup>9</sup> In the latest Verfassungsschutz report for 2019, available at the time of writing this review, the root “radikal” occurs only 29 times mainly in words such as “radicalisation” or “radicalise.” Interestingly, it is never used as a synonym for the term “extremism.” By comparison, the root “extrem” occurs more than 900 times (Bundesministerium des Innern... 2020).

<sup>10</sup> I disagree with the opinion expressed in a review of the English-language edition of Adorno’s lecture by Harry F. Dahms, who claims that “we do not have to concern ourselves with the distinction between radicalism and extremism with regard to his lecture,” because – allegedly – Adorno does not refer in it to groupings and views that are inconsistent with the constitution (*rechtsextremistisch* – extreme right-wing), but rather to those that still fall within the scope of tolerance (and are therefore *rechtsradikal* – radical right-wing) (Dahms 2020: 135-136). Since the official distinction between these terms occurred later, Adorno might have referred to forms of right-wing thinking that were opposed to the democratic system. As pointed out in this text, the terminological apparatus at that time was not as developed as it is now.

so diverse, not to mention that the new opportunities for spreading extreme thought, which were made available by the Internet only later, were not known at the time.

Another characteristic feature of the lecture, which should be attributed to the state of knowledge of political radicalism at the time, is the constant reference to fascism and the comparison of new forms of radicalism to that totalitarian ideology. The association of far-right views with fascism and Nazism was a feature of both journalistic and academic discourse until the 1980s, and was brought to an end in political science by the publication of Pierro Ignazi's *The silent counter-revolution. Hypotheses on the emergence of extreme right-wing parties in Europe* (1992). In this text, Ignazi proposed a distinction between older and newer types of far-right parties in Europe, distinguished by their attachment to Nazism or fascism (stronger in the case of the "old," weak or completely absent in the case of the "new"). We now know that in order to consider a view or behaviour radical right-wing, it does not have to be inspired by the Third Reich, Hitlerism or Italian fascism. It is also clear that while the terms "radicalism," "right-wing extremism" and "far right" are relatively close to each other, using the terms Nazism (and neo-Nazism) and fascism (and neo-fascism) as their synonyms is a serious factual error.<sup>11</sup>

Thus, once again, one would have to excuse Adorno at this point – in the absence of such a clear distinction during his lifetime, it is difficult to attribute to him a conscious error. When he traces elements of fascism in the radical right, and in its strengthening in the late 1960s the rationale for the resurgence of the fascist movement, he is rather giving expression to the still vivid memory of totalitarian crimes. In the case of the German philosopher, these associations are somehow natural, while what should be clear to us is what Marcin Król rightly noted, writing that "fascism existed in a specific country and at a specific time. Our task, however, is to name new phenomena that have a similar origin and shape, but are nevertheless different" (Król 2017). A related issue, which should be left for readers to decide for themselves, is how we should perceive the escalation of far-right tendencies 50 years later. Should we see in it the spectre of returning fascism/Nazism/totalitarianism and the inevitable end of democracy or should we recognise the existence of radical views as a permanent feature of pluralistic democratic systems. Adorno's position on this issue was clear in the lecture. He argued that the existence of right-wing radicalisms of varying degrees of intensity in individual democracies only proves that "in

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<sup>11</sup> Another issue is whether fascism and Nazism can be placed at all on the political left-right axis (cf., e.g., Bartyzel 2010) and whether such a dichotomy still exists to date.

terms of [...] its socio-economic content, democracy has not yet become truly and fully concrete anywhere” (p. 7).

Having made these disclaimers, let us now turn to the content of the lecture itself and to those elements of right-wing radicalism (in Poland, we should add, referred to as the far right, *skrajna prawica*) that have resisted the passage of time. The first one was to point to the “impoverishment [...] of social strata” (p. 5) and “technological unemployment [...] in the age of automation” (p. 6) as the reasons for the strengthening of radical views in societies. Although the progress in question was a far cry from the current developments in robotisation, digitisation and automation of work, Adorno rightly saw in it a cause of the degradation of some groups of people who, as a result, seek support in extremist groups. Thus, in the late 1960s, he was already anticipating the claims that laid foundations for future research on far-right tendencies.

It is worth recalling at this point that the study of the authoritarian personality, in which Adorno and other researchers were involved in the 1940s at UC Berkeley, was only one of several approaches to political radicalisation, which focused on the micro level – the level of the individual (Vichrow 2016: 22). The research in question centred on the impact of personality traits and individual attitudes on specific political decisions, notably the inclination to support fascist solutions. That research has contributed to the development of the concept of the authoritarian personality, as one of the personality types that has a particular tendency to adhere to radical political views. To a large extent, the development of this personality is influenced by family upbringing (Adorno 2010).

Studies on the influence of other factors on the development of extreme views, such as a delayed socialisation process, cultural or socioeconomic elements, were conducted later. The economic issues cited by Adorno, especially unemployment, point to factors relevant to the theory of modernisation losers (*Modernisierungsverlierer*), developed much later in the 1980s, to the concept of disintegration, but also to the theory of relative deprivation adapted to the needs of political science. What they have in common is the claim that social and economic changes lead some social groups to a state of actual or perceived deprivation or lack of something desirable and that individuals react to this deprivation with dissatisfaction (Rippl, Baier 2005: 645). Obviously, the issue here is not only a shortage of material goods, resulting from a poor economic situation, but also the associated deprivation of prestige or the abandonment of dreams of achieving a certain social status. Then dissatisfaction with this shortage gives rise to other observable phenomena, such as changing political views, disillusionment with the elite, increased preju-

dice (especially against those who do not experience this shortage), aggression or xenophobia.

In his lecture, Adorno thus pointed to something that in research on right-wing radicalism was relatively new and, at the time, understudied. In the context of today's discussions about the precarization of a large – especially young – part of society, his words resonate particularly strongly: “even the people who stand within the production process already feel potentially superfluous [...] – they really feel potentially unemployed” (p. 5). What Adorno did not foresee and what he never mentioned in his lecture is the fact that right-wing radicalism can become appealing to the economically well-off, as has been shown in recent years, for example, by research on supporters of the Alternative for Germany party (Schwander, Manow 2017, Lengfeld, Dilger 2018). Indeed, the aforementioned sense of deprivation has begun to extend beyond strictly economic issues to include groups in a (still) economically comfortable position, but who feel politically powerless and culturally alienated or threatened by the overall socioeconomic competitive situation, despite high job security (Miliopoulus 2018: 228).

When it comes to such a broadly understood sense of deprivation and marginalisation, there are two things that became evident during the migration crisis: the co-occurrence of fear and aggression in radical groups when confronted with waves of immigrants (these fears relate only partially to the cultural otherness of the newcomers) and the treatment of immigrants with undisguised superiority. This is brilliantly summed up by Zygmunt Bauman, who states that for people living on the margins, thinking that they have reached the bottom, the discovery of the existence of another bottom below the one to which they have been pushed, is salutary because it allows them to regain their human dignity and the remnants of self-respect, and that nationalism provides them, and their withering or extinguished sense of self-esteem, with a dream life raft (Bauman 2016: 19-20).

Another finding concerning the way radical right-wing movements work, which is still valid, is indicating their catastrophism. Adorno notes that they tend to “feed off apocalyptic fantasies” (p. 8) and in some way they want some catastrophe to happen. Using the extremely subtle irony characteristic of the entire lecture, he also adds: “In this context it is also interesting [...] that such structures, despite the disasters, have a peculiar constancy” (p. 10). On the one hand, the tendency to think in catastrophic terms results from the aforementioned fears and anxieties that characterise not only the supporters of far-right groups, but also their members or the ‘theoreticians’ who develop their ideological programmes. On the other hand, it proves to be an extremely effec-

tive element of political agitation and mobilisation. Referring to the already mentioned migration crisis, the catastrophism of extreme movements made itself known in the form of spreading the visions of being ‘swamped’ by foreign elements (*Überfremdung*), the inevitable and harmful Great Replacement (*Großer Austausch*) of races and cultures or the claim that multiculturalism means *de facto* the self-liquidation of the nation-state.<sup>12</sup> Other manifestation of catastrophism is the intensification of fears of what is unclear or unspecified: the ‘dictate’ of international organisations, ‘gender ideology’, the negative effects of globalisation or excessive political correctness that prevents discussion of burning issues.

At the same time, radical groups position themselves as capable of preventing all these difficulties. This feature is also indicated in Adorno’s lecture when he argues that “these movements always act as if they have already had great successes and attract people through the pretence that they offer guarantees for the future and have all manner of backing” (p. 9). We do not have to look far for contemporary examples of relying on unquestionable authorities, e.g. own past successes, the Church or tradition. This tactic is a characteristic feature of Polish extremist groups and is best exemplified by the ideological declarations of the All-Polish Youth (*Młodzież Wszechpolska*) (cf. Tronina 2020) or the National Radical Camp (*Obóz Narodowo-Radykalny*) movements. We learn from them that the Polish radicals draw on “the best traditions of the National Camp, predominantly the political thought of Roman Dmowski and other creators of the national idea” (*Młodzież Wszechpolska* n.d.) or Catholicism being “a thousand-year-old culture-forming factor, a pillar of Polishness, and a mainstay of national identity” (*Obóz Narodowo-Radykalny ...* n.d.). The existence of this feature among all factions of radical thought is pointed out, among others, by Armin Pfahl-Traughberg, who calls it a “dogmatic claim to absoluteness” (*dogmatischer Absolutheitsanspruch*). It manifests itself in the radicals’ claim that certain views or principles they have adopted are absolutely true, universally valid and indisputable. As such, they become somewhat “sacred” and immune to criticism because they are – seemingly – impossible to verify (Pfahl-Traughber 2010).

Adorno also points out an important error in the perception of radical groups, a problem with which we still seem to struggle today. In his lecture

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<sup>12</sup> The terms used here have been derived from the glossary used by the German identitarian movement. It is worth noting, though, that such slogans are popular with almost all far-right groups and are familiar even to groups such as Alternative for Germany, which sits in the German Bundestag (Cf., e.g., Kałabunowska (2018).

he states: “One should not underestimate these movements on account of their low intellectual level and lack of theory. I think it would show a very weak political eye if one concluded from this that they are unsuccessful” (p. 9). A few pages later, however, Adorno himself falls victim to this error when he states that radical movements are “by no means based on any developed theory” (p. 13). It seems that the thesis about the alleged anti-intellectualism or, as Adorno writes, the ‘atheoreticism’ of the extreme right cannot be sustained, certainly not in relation to the entire spectrum of radical right circles, such as those associated with the New Right.

This finding brings us to another characteristic feature of right-wing radicals, i.e. clever use of all manipulation techniques. Adorno takes the position that in the case of the new right, the aforementioned intellectual layer is replaced by “an extraordinary perfection of certain methods” (p. 9), a “form of allusion that has been elevated to a sophisticated technique” (p. 14), which is meant to intrigue potential new supporters, and at the same time confuse the system of constitutional protection. “Openly anti-democratic aspects are removed” (p. 15), both in the case of the extreme right of the 1960s and of today.

Thus, the German philosopher believes that radicals’ cunning propaganda is a cover for a lack of solid ideological foundations. This manifests itself in concretism, the use of large amounts of hard-to-verify and out-of-context data, formalism and “the trick of the official or the certified” (p. 19), which give the impression that we are dealing with a professional and rational partner in a political discussion. And while indeed most of these traits are still exhibited by radicals today, thanks to new technologies even more intensely, one wonders, however, about the legitimacy of calling this set of traits “pseudo-scientific pedantry” (p. 18).

Let us take as an example a strategy used by contemporary French or German identitarians, who, having abandoned typically far-right analogies, reached for ancient motifs. Their logo does not feature runic letters, Celtic symbols or a swastika, as we have come to expect from radical organisations so far, but the Greek letter lambda. By using it, the identitarians are attempting to allude to the heroic struggle of the Spartans at the Battle of Thermopylae. Only ostensibly, however, is it a praise of stubbornness and perseverance, as the identitarians themselves claim. Researchers have found another message in this mythology: a symbolic reference to the heroic struggle of the few – in history: Spartans, today: European Christians – in the face of a deluge of numerically larger and culturally alien forces, where the ancient Persians are embodied by modern Muslim immigrants (Hentges, Kökgiran, Nottbohm 2014; Bruns, Glösel, Strobl 2017). It is precisely such ideological references that are

very common for contemporary radical groups and the line between intellectualisation and the sublimation of propaganda techniques seems to be extremely thin here. However, I believe that accusing radicals of ‘pseudo-science’ and ‘atheoreticism’ somehow belittles their role as political opponents. It seems that this adversary is highly skilled in manipulating data and arguments, which makes them even more unpredictable and deaf to attempts to rationalise these data or arguments. Besides, would there be today entire research groups and projects aimed at deciphering the messages of the far right if we were dealing with simple and intellectually shallow structure?

Finally, it is also worth referring to the remedies proposed by Adorno, especially since this part of his lecture seems to be the most interesting and convincing in its simplicity. The German philosopher proposes several strategies for dealing with right-wing radicals in public space. One of them again recalls the heated debates surrounding the outbreak of the migration crisis, when some groups believed that appeals to morality and a sense of sharing a common destiny could help allay the fears voiced by nationalists. The suggestion is found on page 11: “One should not operate primarily with ethical appeals, with appeals to humanity, for the word ‘humanity’ itself, and everything associated with it, sends the people in question into a rage; they see it as fear and weakness”. Adorno’s position is that “one should appeal to the real interests instead of moralizing” (p. 21) because only such rational language can convince radicals, who cherish – as mentioned above – formalism and concretism. The author also adds that there are other helpful solutions, such as: warning “potential followers” (p. 11), “especially young people” of the possible consequences of falling into the sphere of influence of extremist groups, as well as referring “to the central interests of those who are targeted by propaganda” (p. 11). In other words, an effective strategy for coping with the new right-wing radicalism is not to prove the validity and moral superiority of arguments voiced by the radicals’ opponents, but to indicate the shortcomings of these groups themselves, which is designed to discourage others from joining their ranks.

Other methods, which, according to Adorno, would contribute to curbing the development of extremist tendencies, are deciphering and stigmatising the aforementioned tricks used by radicals in their propaganda activities. What, in turn, is unlikely to succeed is to pretend that the problem does not exist or to ostentatiously ignore the presence of radicals in public life. Adorno calls it “the ‘hush hush’ tactic” (p. 21). I think it can also include the tactic of isolating radical groups with parliamentary representation, which is familiar to many countries, including Germany (cf. Heinze 2020).

The Polish 2020 edition of *Aspects of the New Right-Wing Extremism* also features an afterword by Volker Weiss, a German historian, columnist and researcher of the conservative revolution. Although Weiss is not affiliated with any major German research centre investigating right-wing extremism,<sup>13</sup> his works on this topic have received a great deal of publicity, notably *Deutschlands Neue Rechte. Angriff der Eliten – Von Spengler bis Sarrazin* from 2011 and *Die autoritäre Revolte. Die Neue Rechte und der Untergang des Abendlandes* published in 2017, which should be categorised as popular science, if not journalistic. A great advantage of the afterword is a biographical sketch of Adorno, followed by a detailed description of the functions and significance of the Institute for Social Research, with which the philosopher was closely associated (pp. 26-28). Weiss emphasises that Adorno's attitude to the issues discussed in the lecture is a product not only of the historical reality of the time, but also of his private research and emigration experiences. He stresses that, as a result, "reading the speech thus requires that we distinguish between context-dependent and fundamental aspects" (p. 26). What Weiss considers fundamental in particular is Adorno's point about the rise of resentment among individuals who seem to be losing control of their lives. He goes on to argue that "The knowledge that one could be more, but is not, still drives people to acts of collective narcissism" (p. 30). Referring to today's aspects of radicalism – the existence of the so-called *Wütbürger* group, the *AfD* party, right-wing criticism of left-wing solutions, anti-EU or anti-Islamic tendencies – he calls for an expansion of the debate about "the current authoritarian revolt, which is not based solely on racism" (p. 32). He also highlights the turn of modern radicals towards anachronism, which is a constant trend despite the passage of 50 years since Adorno pointed it out. Weiss notes that "today the immense pull of misogynistic and homophobic agitation in times of equal rights or the revival of religious fundamentalism in the midst of a secular present show how deceptive a sense of security in the light of civilizational advances can be" (p. 33). This is one of those reflections that accompany the reader throughout the reading of the entire text.

The numerous references to contemporary events, especially to *AfD* activity, which can be found in both Weiss' afterword and reviews of the whole work, show how valid many of Adorno's points are, but at the same time cast doubt

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<sup>13</sup> These major centres include the Hanna Arendt Institute for Totalitarianism Studies, the Göttingen Institute for Democracy Research, KomRex – the Centre for Research on Right-Wing Extremism at the University of Jena, or FORENA – the research unit for right-wing extremism and neo-Nazism at the Hochschule Düsseldorf.

on one of them. This applies to the statement that “there is even a risk that precisely this movement might remove Germany from world politics, from the tendency of world politics as such, and completely provincialize it” (p. 12). The presence of radical groups on the German political scene, more or less intense and invasive at various times in Germany’s post-war history, has not led to a decline in the country’s importance on the international stage. Likewise, the presence of extremist parties in parliaments and governments of other countries does not rapidly diminish their importance as long as these parties do not previously weaken the structures of their states.

In this context and seemingly contrary to Adorno’s expectations, it needs to be said that the radical right has become a natural element in a number of contemporary party systems, with all of the characteristic features mentioned by him. This is too bad, as Weiss says in the afterword, “simply defending the status quo will fail as a defensive strategy without the realisation that the rightist renaissance is itself a result of that same status quo” (p. 35). Just as Adorno’s lecture in 1967 should be regarded as a political intervention by the sociologist and philosopher in the social discussion taking place in the German-speaking area (Schadt 2019), the publication of this text in the late 2010s in Germany, and subsequently in other countries, can be considered a call to reflect on this state of affairs; a call to close ranks among those groups whose sets of values are markedly different. Hopefully, this analysis of the Polish edition of *Aspects of the New Right-Wing Extremism* has shown that while reflection on the issue of radicalism is necessary, it cannot be restricted to automatic historical analogies or the constant use of the same medications for “the scars of democracy” (p. 7).

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