

# The New Criterion

## Features

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## Leszek Kolakowski & the anatomy of totalitarianism

by [Roger Kimball](#)

*On the life and work of the philosopher Leszek Kolakowski, who is “well-known without being known well.”*

*It's possible that I shall make an ass of myself. But in that case one can always get out of it with a little dialectic. I have, of course, so worded my proposition as to be right either way. —Marx to Engels, 1857*

*What socialism implies above all is keeping account of everything. —V. I. Lenin, 1917*

*Le coeur a ses raisons que la raison ne connaît point. —Pascal, Pensées*

Born in Radom, in eastern Poland, in 1927, the philosopher Leszek Kolakowski is closing in on his eightieth year. He has come a long way. He was a boy of twelve when the Nazis stormed into Poland. “I remember the destruction of the Warsaw Ghetto,” he writes in “Genocide and Ideology” (1978), “which I saw from outside; I lived among Poles who were active in helping Jews and who risked their lives every day trying to save those few who could be saved from the inferno.” In 1945, the war over, he joined the Communist Party: the Communists were anti-fascist, weren't they? (Were they?) He studied and then taught philosophy in Warsaw, where he also edited a scholarly journal.

Maturity brought forth doubts; doubts brought forth criticism; criticism was a dangerous commodity in Soviet-controlled Poland. In 1954, Kolakowski was accused of “straying from Marxist-Leninist ideology.” (True, all too true.) In 1966, after delivering a speech commemorating the tenth anniversary of the “October thaw,” he was expelled from the Party with all the usual ceremony. The state-controlled press launched a series of attacks on the renegade. He was removed from his university chair for “forming the views of the youth in a manner contrary to the official tendency of the country.” In 1968, he went into exile. His works were promptly enrolled in the Index of forbidden authors and, until 1981, could be neither referred to nor cited officially. After leaving Poland, Kolakowski taught at several Western universities, including McGill, Yale, the University of Chicago (for more than a decade he was part of the Committee on Social Thought), and Oxford, where he now lives in semi-retirement. Throughout the 1980s, he aided and abetted the Solidarity movement, which was instrumental in ridding Poland of its Communist oppressors.

Jacques Barzun once said of Walter Bagehot that he was “‘well-known’ without being known well.” Something similar can be said of Kolakowski. No academic is more distinguished than Leszek Kolakowski. He boasts a string of glittering honors and prizes that includes—I confine myself to a few A-list American awards—a MacArthur Fellowship (the so-called “genius” award, justified for once), the Jefferson Award, and, in 2003, the first Kluge Prize for “lifetime achievement in the

humanities,” a commendation that carries a purse of \$1 million.

Kolakowski’s bibliography is equally long and distinguished. It includes plays, moral and theological tales, and a long shelf of books and articles on the Church Fathers, on Pascal, on Henri Bergson, on English empiricism and the tradition of positivism, on the fate of religion in a secular age and the prospects of secularism in the hands of an animal as obstinately given to religious preoccupations as *homo sapiens sapiens*. Above all, perhaps, Kolakowski is known as a keen anatomist of totalitarianism. His patient investigations into the origins and the murderous legacy of Marxism—culminating in his *magnum opus*, *Main Currents of Marxism* (English translation, 1978)—occupy pride of place in the precious library of philosophical and political disenchantment.

It would be an injustice, however, if this impressive inventory were to obscure one of Kolakowski’s most conspicuous gifts: I mean his humor. Consider, for example, this title: “A Comment on Heidegger’s Comment on Nietzsche’s Alleged Comment on Hegel’s Comment on the Power of Negativity.” This orotund pseudo-scholarly rubric neatly ushers Kolakowski into a serious point. In a famous interview with *Der Spiegel* published in 1976 shortly after his death, Heidegger was at pains to exonerate himself from his association with the Nazis. Among other things, he suggested that anyone who had ears to hear would know that he had criticized the Nazi regime in his lectures on Nietzsche and the Will to Power. “It probably takes an ear subtler than mine,” Kolakowski notes, “to hear this criticism.” Indeed, he shows that Heidegger “obliquely but clearly” expressed his commitment to German imperialism in those lectures. While on the subject of humor, I should also direct readers to Kolakowski’s book *The Key to Heaven: Edifying Tales from Holy Scripture to Serve as Teaching and Warning*. You will never regard the story of Job (or Noah, Lot’s wife, Sarah and Abraham, or Jacob and Esau) in quite the same light. (“In the highest sphere of heaven stood an elegant bar where Jehovah was wont to receive the reports of His scouts ...”)

Despite his eminence, however, Kolakowski has largely escaped, at least in America, the dubious accolades of celebrity. Jacques Derrida has much greater brand recognition, as do Michel Foucault and, probably, Richard Rorty and others further down the intellectual food chain. Kolakowski inhabits a different order of distinction. The publication last year of *The Two Eyes of Spinoza*,<sup>[1]</sup> a collection of philosophical essays, the upcoming publication of *My Correct Views on Everything*<sup>[2]</sup> (another collection of essays), and a new edition of *Main Currents of Marxism*<sup>[3]</sup> afford a welcome opportunity to say something about the achievement of this extraordinarily subtle and illuminating thinker.

Perhaps the first thing that should be said about the new edition of *Main Currents of Marxism* concerns the peril it presents to those with weak backs or delicate wrists. When first published in English by Oxford University Press, the book appeared in three large volumes. Norton has chosen to supersize the book, offering it to us in one enormous, unwieldy tome. I suppose this is cheaper to produce. It is also harder to use.

As far as I can tell, the text is unchanged except for the addition of a brief preface. Although only a few pages long, the preface is valuable for three things. It reminds us straightaway—this emerges as a theme of the book—that Marxist doctrine, by calling for the abolition of private property and the more or less total subordination of the market to state control, provided “a good blueprint for converting human society into a giant concentration camp.” (“[T]he abolition of the market,” Kolakowski comments elsewhere, “means a *gulag* society.”) Kolakowski also makes the important point that, notwithstanding the collapse of the Soviet Union, Marxism is still eminently worth studying, not least because its aspirations continue to percolate in the dreams of various utopian planners. (You needn’t go to China or even Cuba: just look at the increasingly pink and authoritarian complexion of the European Union.) Moreover, as Kolakowski puts it in his introduction to *My Correct Views on Everything*,

Communism was not the crazy fantasy of a few fanatics, nor the result of human stupidity and baseness; it was a real, very real part of the history of the twentieth century, and we cannot understand this history of ours without understanding communism. We cannot get rid of this specter by saying it was just “human stupidity,” or “human corruptibility.” The specter is stronger than the spells we cast on it. It might come back to life.

Finally, Kolakowski’s new preface contains an arresting aside about the book’s publication history. Written in Polish between 1968 and 1976 “when their publication in Poland could only be dreamed of,” the three volumes of *Main Currents* were first published in Paris by the Institut Littéraire from 1976–78 and were circulated underground in Poland. They were not published legally in Poland until 2000. In the intervening years the book has been translated into many languages, including Chinese. In French, however, only the first two volumes, which take the story of Marxism through the death of Lenin, have been published. The third volume, which deals with Stalinism and its allotropes—including New Left thinkers like Louis Althusser and Sartre—is still waiting for a French translation. Why? Perhaps, Kolakowski speculates, because its publication “would provoke such an outrage among French leftists that the publishers were afraid to risk it.” I wish that some public-spirited soul would publish a French version so that we could make the experiment.

The philosopher David Stove once observed, “As an item on the intellectual agenda, Marxism is scarcely even a joke... . Marxism is a fearful social—and police—problem, but so is the drug trade. It is a fearsome political problem, but so is Islamic fundamentalism. But an *intellectual* problem Marxism is not, any more than the drug trade or Islamic fundamentalism.” Kolakowski has devoted the 1500 pages of *Main Currents of Marxism* as well as a dozen or more essays to Marxism, its genesis, its permutations, its horrifying record of mass murder. In an essay in *My Correct Views of Everything* called “What is Left of Socialism?” (1995), he apostrophizes Karl Marx as “a powerful mind, a very learned man, and a good German writer” (“good,” I feel constrained to add, in the way the curate’s egg was good: *The Communist Manifesto*, the *Theses on Feuerbach*, *The German Ideology* contain some powerful rhetoric, but have you looked into *Das Kapital* or the *Grundrisse* lately?).

Yet I suspect that Kolakowski would agree with Stove. He does not endorse Marxism as an intellectual phenomenon. Rather, he takes it seriously as a product of human spiritual striving. This involves him in a complicated historical itinerary. Looking for the origin of the dialectic, Kolakowski takes readers back to “the soteriology of Plotinus,” providing a lofty vantage point from which to regard the sage who assured his audience (in the endlessly quoted snippet from the *Theses on Feuerbach*) that “hitherto, philosophers have only interpreted the world; the point is to change it.” Meister Eckhart and Nicholas of Cusa loom as large in Kolakowski’s exposition of Marx as do the proletariat, the labor theory of value, and the “contradictions of capitalism.” He does not give Marxism the benefit of the doubt, exactly, but he does give it the benefit of patient scrutiny and the highest level of historical intelligence.

The results of that scrutiny are devastating. Notwithstanding its pretensions to “science” (perhaps the most grotesque aspect of Marxism’s intellectual pretension—remember, for example, Engels’ insistence that social laws were no less objective than geological deposits), Marxism has proven to be completely barren as an instrument of social understanding or prediction. This does not mean, as Kolakowski points out, that Marx’s theories have not been useful. It’s just that their usefulness has been confined entirely to providing “a set of slogans that were supposed to justify and glorify communism and the slavery that inevitably goes with it.”

*All* of Marx’s major predictions have turned out to be wrong. He said that societies based on a market economy would suffer spiraling class polarization and the disappearance of the middle class. Every society lucky enough to enjoy the fruits of a market economy shows that Marx was wrong

about that. He predicted the growing immiseration and impoverishment of the working class in capitalist societies. (Actually, he didn't merely predict that it would happen, he predicted that it would happen *necessarily* and *inevitably*—thanks, Hegel!) The opposite has happened. Indeed, as Kolakowski notes, “in the second edition of *Capital* Marx updated various statistics and figures, but not those relating to workers' wages; those figures, if updated, would have contradicted his theory.”

Marx further predicted the inevitable revolution of the proletariat. This is the very motor of Marxism. Take away the proletarian revolution and you neuter the theory. But there have been no proletarian revolutions. The Bolshevik revolution, as Kolakowski points out, “had nothing to do with Marxian prophesies. Its driving force was not a conflict between the industrial working class and capital, but rather was carried out under slogans that had no socialist, let alone Marxist, content: Peace and Land for Peasants.” Marx said that in a capitalist economy, untrammelled competition would inevitably squeeze profit margins: eventually—and soon!—the economy would grind to a halt and capitalism would collapse. Take a look at capitalist economies in the hundred and fifty years since Marx wrote: have profit margins evaporated? Marx thought that capitalist economies would hamper technical progress: the opposite is true.

No, Marxism has been as wrong as it is possible for a theory to be wrong. Addicted to “the self-deification of mankind,” it continually bears witness to what Kolakowski calls “the farcical aspect of human bondage.” Why then was Marxism like moral catnip—not so much among its proposed beneficiaries, the working classes, but among the educated elite? Well, beguiling simplicity was part of it. “One of the causes of the popularity of Marxism among educated people,” Kolakowski notes, “was the fact that in its simple form it was very easy.” Marxism—like Freudianism, like Darwinism, like Hegelianism—is a “one key fits all locks” philosophy. All aspects of human experience can be referred to the operation of a single all-governing process which thereby offers the illusion of universal explanation.

Marxism also spoke powerfully to mankind's unsatisfied utopian impulses. How imperfect a construct is capitalist society: how much conflict does it abet, how many desires does it leave unsatisfied! Can we not imagine a world beyond those tensions and conflicts in which we could realize our full human potential without competition, without scarcity, without want? Sure, we can imagine it, but there is a reason that “utopia” means “nowhere.” Kolakowski shows how Marxism speaks powerfully to those unrealized, and unrealizable, utopian dreams. Marxism, he wrote, was the “greatest fantasy” of the twentieth century, not because it offered a better life but because it appealed to apparently ineradicable spiritual cravings.

The influence that Marxism has achieved, far from being the result or proof of its scientific character, is almost entirely due to its prophetic, fantastic, and irrational elements. Marxism is a doctrine of blind confidence that a paradise of universal satisfaction is awaiting us just around the corner. Almost all the prophecies of Marx and his followers have already proved to be false, but this does not disturb the spiritual certainty of the faithful, any more than it did in the case of chiliastic sects.... In this sense Marxism performs the function of a religion, and its efficacy is of a religious character. But it is a caricature and a bogus form of religion, since it presents its temporal eschatology as a scientific system, which religious mythologies do not purport to be.

Of course, it is not just to mankind's spiritual cravings that Marxism appeals. It also speaks to its inherent thuggishness. This cannot be emphasized too much. These days, Stalin and Stalinism are in bad odor. We forget the romance that Western intellectuals indulged for this mass murderer. We also tend to overlook the fact that thuggishness is an integral, not an accidental, feature of Marxism. Marx spoke of the “dictatorship of the proletariat.” What did he mean by “dictatorship”? Lenin explained. “Dictatorship,” he wrote in 1906, “means unlimited power based on force, and not on

law.” In case that was not sufficiently compelling, Lenin added the word “scientific”: “The scientific term ‘dictatorship’ means nothing more nor less than authority untrammelled by any laws, absolutely unrestricted by any rules whatever, and based directly on violence.” In 1917, Lenin got the chance to show the world what this theory would look like when put into action. “He created a system,” Kolakowski observes, “in which, depending on the whim of a local party or police authority, any criticism might be regarded as counter-revolutionary and expose its author to imprisonment or death.” Hence the importance of terror, an essential ingredient in the revolutionary’s utopian program at least since Robespierre spoke of “virtue and its emanation, terror.” “The courts,” Lenin wrote in 1922, “must not ban terror . . . but must formulate the motives underlying it, legalize it as a principle, plainly, without any make-believe.”

The crucial thing to bear in mind, however, is not the brutality of Communist rule—what we might call really existing Marxism—but its spuriousness and contempt for law. This is what distinguishes ordinary despotism from its totalitarian counterpart. “A law,” Kolakowski notes, “may provide draconic penalties for small offenses without being specifically totalitarian; what is characteristic of totalitarian law is the use of such formulas as Lenin’s: people may be executed for expressing views that may ‘objectively serve the interests of the bourgeoisie.’ This means that the government can put to death anyone it chooses; there is no such thing as law; it is not that the criminal code is severe, but that it has no existence except in name.”

In other words, the very arbitrariness of Communist rule is a coefficient of its ambition to total control of life. Lenin said that what socialism implies above all is “keeping account of everything.” Everything was subject to regulation from above because nothing had significance apart from the diktats of the Party. In this sense, Marxism is a solution in which the idea of intrinsic value dissolves into absolute expediency. For the Communist there is no such thing as impartiality or disinterestedness because there is no such thing as an independent object of value. Nothing has inherent significance because everything acquires value from its function in the impersonal engine of utopia.

Stalin once remarked that the death of an individual is a tragedy, but the death of a million is a statistic. What he neglected to add is that, for the Communist, there is no such thing as the individual. By the same token, there is no such thing as independent judgment—scholarly, judicial, or even aesthetic judgment. Our postmodern literary critics are fond of declaring that “there is no such thing as”—take your pick: intrinsic value, objectivity, disinterestedness, impartiality, even truth. It landed them in a cloud-cuckoo-land of self-contradictory nihilism. But Marx and Lenin got there before them. For the Marxist, art and literature are not human pursuits guided by their own rules of achievement but rather instruments to be used for the shifting and arbitrary ends of the Party. “Down with non-partisan writers!,” Lenin wrote in 1905, “Down with literary supermen! Literature must become part of the common cause of the proletariat, ‘a cog and a screw’ of one single great Social-Democratic mechanism set in motion by the entire politically conscious vanguard of the entire working class!”

Sidney Hook described *Main Currents of Marxism* as “magisterial.” Quite right, too. In its nimble mastery of intellectual history and generous humanity, the book has no equal. Kolakowski’s survey of Marxist thought is breathtaking in its sweep—from the Bible and the Greeks through the web of nineteenth-century socialist thought and the florid dissemination of Marxist and quasi-Marxist ideas in the “new-age” redoubts of the twentieth century, Kolakowski has provided the definitive account of a spiritual-political itinerary gone terribly wrong.

But what impresses one about *Main Currents of Marxism* is not only Kolakowski’s breadth or learning but also his economy. This is a book from which the reader benefits from the author’s great powers of distillation. It is a long book. In the hands of most writers, it would have been much longer. Kolakowski has an uncanny ability to seize upon and express the essential features of the

doctrines he discusses. No doubt this is partly a matter of talent. It is also a testament to the huge labor, not only of reading but also of sifting and synthesizing, that went into the book. Kolakowski gives us not his first thoughts but his considered judgments, honed of the superfluous. Anyone who reads these sobering volumes will come away with not only an understanding of the intellectual and spiritual precursors of Marxism, but also a good grasp of the essentials of “classical” Marxist doctrine and its hybridization in the Soviet Union, the Frankfurt School, and other left-wing impulses. Writing about the amorphous New Left of the 1960s, for example, Kolakowski notes that although

the ideological fantasies of this movement ... were no more than a nonsensical expression of the whims of spoilt middle-class children, and while the extremists among them were virtually indistinguishable from Fascist thugs, the movement did without doubt express a profound crisis of faith in the values that had inspired democratic societies for many decades.... The New Left explosion of academic youth was an aggressive movement born of frustration, which easily created a vocabulary for itself out of Marxist slogans ... : liberation, revolution, alienation, etc. Apart from this, its ideology really has little in common with Marxism. It consists of “revolution” without the working class; hatred of modern technology as such; ... the cult of primitive societies ... as the source of progress; hatred of education and specialized knowledge.

Sound familiar?

Any student of Marxism is perforce a student of intellectual and political pathology, and *Main Currents of Marxism*, in addition to its other accomplishments, is a pathologist’s scrapbook, a catalogue of brutal, often phantasmagoric, deformations. Kolakowski’s approach is generally more descriptive and diagnostic than polemical, but he can wax polemical to deadly effect when the occasion arises. The title essay of *My Correct Views on Everything* is Kolakowski’s devastating response to a 100-page “Open Letter to Leszek Kolakowski” published by E. P. Thompson in the *Socialist Review* in 1973. Thompson is the author of *The Making of the English Working Class* (1963), an object of pious veneration among the Marxist and socialist brotherhood. His “Letter” is an expression, by turns righteously indignant and cloyingly sentimental, of his feelings of “injury and betrayal” at Kolakowski’s criticisms of Communism. “We were both voices of the Communist revisionism of 1956,” Thompson sniffed, “we both sought to rehabilitate the utopian energies within the socialist tradition.” What happened?

Kolakowski’s response is a salvo that would have made Cato the Elder proud. Recalling Thompson’s refusal to sit down at a table with Robert Cecil because he once worked in the British diplomatic service: “O blessed Innocence! You and I, we were both active in our respective Communist Parties in the ’40s and ’50s, which means that, whatever our noble intentions and our charming ignorance (or refusal to get rid of ignorance) were, we supported, within our modest means, a regime based on mass slave labor and police terror of the worst kind in human history. Do you think that there are many people who could refuse to sit at the same table with us on these grounds?” Kolakowski quotes this effusion, reminiscent of the more utopian passages of Marx’s *German Ideology* “My own utopia,” Thompson wrote,

two hundred years ahead, would not be like Morris’s “epoch of rest.” It would be a world (as D. H. Lawrence would have it) where the “money values” give way before the “life values,” or (as Blake would have it) “corporeal” will give way to “mental” war. With sources of power easily available, some men and women might choose to live in unified communities, sited, like Cistercian monasteries, in centres of great natural beauty, where agricultural, industrial and intellectual pursuits might be combined. Others might prefer the variety and pace of an urban life which rediscovers some of the qualities of the city-state. Others will prefer a life of seclusion, and many will pass

between all three. Scholars would follow the disputes of different schools, in Paris, Jakarta or Bogota.

As Kolakowski notes, “This is a very good sample of socialist writing. It amounts to saying that the world should be good, and not bad.” Nice work if you can get it! But of course, Thompson cannot get it, and neither can anyone else. It is just unadulterated hokum, nauseating in its sentimentality, dangerous in its appeal to the credulous. Thompson dreams of a world in which “corporeal” war gives way to merely “mental” war (Lawrence and Blake would be among his heroes), but Kolakowski is right that this dream is thoroughly utopian: “We do not know how to harmonize the contradictory tasks contemporary society imposes upon us. We can only try to reach an uncertain balance between these tasks because we have no blueprint for a conflictless and secure society.”

To be an anatomist of totalitarianism is also to be a connoisseur of freedom, its many beguiling counterfeits as well as its genuine aspirations. The question—the lure, the never fulfilled but inescapable promise—of freedom stands at the center of much of Kolakowski’s work. In “The Self-Poisoning of the Open Society,” reprinted in *Modernity on Endless Trial* (1990), Kolakowski dilates on an antinomy of liberalism that beset Western societies during the Cold War and is, if anything, even more pressing today as we negotiate what amounts to a moral war with fundamentalist Islam. The antinomy is this: liberalism implies openness to other points of view, even (it would seem) those points of view whose success would destroy liberalism. Tolerance to those points of view is a prescription for suicide. Intolerance betrays the fundamental premise of liberalism, i.e. openness.

Kolakowski is surely right that our liberal, pluralist democracy depends for its survival not only on the continued existence of its institutions, but also “on a belief in their value and a widespread will to defend them.”

Do we, as a society, enjoy that belief? Do we possess the requisite will? The jury is still out on those questions. A good test is the extent to which we can resolve the antinomy of liberalism. And a good start on that problem is the extent to which we realize that the antinomy is, in the business of everyday life, illusory. The “openness” that liberal society rightly cherishes is not a vacuous openness to *all* points of view: it is not “value neutral.” It need not, indeed it cannot, say Yes to all comers. American democracy, for example, affords its citizens great latitude, but great latitude is not synonymous with the proposition that “anything goes.” Our society, like every society, is founded on particular positive values—the rule of law, for example, respect for the individual, religious freedom, the separation of church and state. Western democratic society, that is to say, is rooted in what Kolakowski calls a “vision of the world.” Part of that vision is a commitment to openness, but openness is not the same as indifference.

In his book *Orthodoxy*, G. K. Chesterton championed freedom of thought, but wisely noted that “There is a thought that stops thought. That is the only thought that ought to be stopped.” Our society is extraordinarily accommodating of diverse points of view—especially, it sometimes seems, to those that are hostile to the ideal of diversity. In order to continue to enjoy the luxury of freedom, we must say No to those movements that would exploit freedom only to abolish it. “In order to defend itself,” Kolakowski writes, “the pluralist order should voice [its fundamental] values ceaselessly and loudly. There is nothing astonishing or outrageous about the fact that within the pluralist society, the defenders and enemies of its basic principles are not treated with exactly the same indifference.”

Part of what makes Kolakowski’s reflections on freedom and its vicissitudes so fruitful is his understanding that human freedom is inextricably tied to a recognition of limits, which in the end involves a recognition of the sacred. This has been a leitmotif of his work from the beginning. In *The Alienation of Reason* (1966), he criticizes positivism as “an attempt to consolidate science as a

self-sufficient activity, which exhausts all the possible ways of appropriating the world intellectually.”

In “Man Does Not Live by Reason Alone” (1991), Kolakowski argues that “mankind can never get rid of the need for religious self-identification: who am I, where did I come from, where do I fit in, why am I responsible, what does my life mean, how will I face death? Religion is a paramount aspect of human culture. Religious need cannot be ex-communicated from culture by rationalist incantation. Man does not live by reason alone.” He shows how the tendency to believe that all human problems have a technical solution is an unfortunate inheritance from the Enlightenment—“even,” he notes, “from the *best* aspects of the Enlightenment: from its struggle against intolerance, self-complacency, superstitions, and uncritical worship of tradition.” There is much about human life that is not susceptible to human remedy or intervention. Our allegiance to the ideal of unlimited progress is, paradoxically, a dangerous moral limitation that is closely bound up with what Kolakowski calls the loss of the sacred. “With the disappearance of the sacred,” he writes,

which imposed limits to the perfection that could be attained by the profane, arises one of the most dangerous illusions of our civilization—the illusion that there are no limits to the changes that human life can undergo, that society is “in principle” an endlessly flexible thing, and that to deny this flexibility and this perfectibility is to deny man’s total autonomy and thus to deny man himself.

These are wise words, grippingly pertinent to an age conjuring with the immense technological novelties of cloning, genetic engineering, and other Promethean temptations. We pride ourselves today on our “openness” and commitment to liberal ideals, our empathy for other cultures, and our sophisticated understanding that our way of viewing the world is, after all, only our way of viewing the world. But Kolakowski reminds us that, without a prior commitment to substantive values—to an ideal of the good and (just as important) an acknowledgment of evil—openness threatens to degenerate into vacuousness. Given the shape of our post-Soviet, technologically infatuated world, perhaps it is that admonition, even more than his heroic demolition of Marxism, for which Leszek Kolakowski will be honored in the decades to come.

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## Notes

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1. *The Two Eyes of Spinoza: and Other Essays on Philosophers*, by Leszek Kolakowski; St. Augustine’s Press, 311 pages, \$32. [Go back to the text.](#)
2. *My Correct Views on Everything*, by Leszek Kolakowski; St. Augustine’s Press, 368 pages, \$32. Two essays in this collection appeared in *The New Criterion*: “Crime and Punishment” (November 1991) and “Leibniz and Job: The Metaphysics of Evil and the Experience of Evil” (December 2003). [Go back to the text.](#)
3. *Main Currents of Marxism: The Founders, The Golden Age, The Breakdown*, by Leszek Kolakowski; W. W. Norton, 1504 pages, \$49.95. [Go back to the text.](#)

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