

ANTONI KUKLINSKI: THE MAN WHO WOULD NOT QUIT

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Over the many years that I have known Antoni Kuklinski a change has taken place in this learned and complex personality. From a relatively relaxed but astute observer of what happened around him he became an obsessed man haunted by visions of almost apocalyptic proportions. This change took a concrete form during the first decade of this century and has been documented in his latest book – in a way his testament – *In Search of New Paradigms: Selected Papers 2001-2011*.

This book shows that during the last 10 years or so he became more and more of a visionary and a visionary worthy of the last book of the New Testament *Apocalypse*. But contrary to the Revelation accorded to John, Antoni Kuklinski is more concrete and more obsessed to what he sees going on around him in recent times.

This is confirmed if only one looks at some of the titles of the chapters of his book: titles like *The creation and destruction of the global order*, or *The future of Europe: four dilemmas*, and another *The dilemma – innovation versus imitation, the case of Poland*, and also *The enigma of the triple European Mezzogiorno*, etc. But if one thinks that the book is solely about disasters ahead the reader is in for a surprise. Because Kuklinski at the same time comes up with positive ideas to avoid the apocalypse in chapters like *Globalization in the XXI century, in quest of a new paradigm*, or *The renaissance of European strategic thinking*, and of course about his own country *Polonia quo vadis? Knowledge, imagination, responsibility*, and about his beloved regional questions *Towards a new model of regional policy, etc.*

The world population can be divided into four categories. People who have a vision; those who have a sense of detail; or the few who have both a vision *and* a sense of detail. Of course, most have none of the above. If I am allowed to make an estimate I would put 60 percent in the last category. They just don't give a damn. Maybe 35 percent have a sense of detail. These are the bureaucrats of all kinds and shapes – useful or less so - who can be found in all walks of life. Around 3 percent have a vision. They tend to be the prophets, philosophers, and other preachers who are often listened to but rarely followed during their lifetime. Some end up on the cross... And then there are the 2 percent who have both a vision and a sense of detail. In order to change things – whether in an enterprise, a ministry, a university or a government – we need people who have both the *vision* to see things in context and set strategies for the future and a *sense of detail* to follow and impose its implementation.

Antoni Kuklinski is a special case. He is among the 3 percent with a vision but he also gives indications, with a very broad brush it is true, of how to get there. I would therefore classify him as one of the extremely unique persons with a vision *and* the contours of the required detail or maybe better put the contours of a strategy to avoid the apocalypse. I shall give a few examples taken out of the book under consideration.

Right at the beginning of the book he considers whether the Atlantic Community is the “Titanic of the XXI century.” Kuklinski maintains that the “dramatic Gordian Knot of the Community is the destruction of the unity of Western Civilization, i.e. the unity of the European Union and the United States of America as an integrated actor on the global scene. This is the apocalypse and the vision. But then he gives a hint (contours) of a possible solution. “We need mega-historical Alexandrian Solutions to establish the unity of the Atlantic Community as an integrated and powerful actor of the global scene of the XXI century.” This can be done by a combination of soft and hard global power by actors who are strong enough to participate in the creation of a new global order. In passing I must draw attention to the choice of language (Gordian Knots and Alexandrian Solutions) which clarifies in a few words complicated issues (pages 11-13.)

The next example concerns what is called the “European Drama” and starts with the marvelous phrase “The discussion related to the future of Europe should try to sail down the golden stream between the

Scylla of voluntary and the Charybdis of fatalistic approaches.” (p. 79) The Apocalypse would be that European freedom of choice and action will be vastly reduced and maybe even eliminated through the globalization process within which Europe will be too feeble to actively participate. But here again Kuklinski presents us with the contours of a positive approach through a discussion of five scenarios among which we find the welfare scenario, the Darwinian scenario, and the Christian scenario. Again, this is not exactly a sense of detail but the beginning of defining a strategy to avoid a European apocalypse.

Antoni Kuklinski has had a wealth of experience in regional studies and planning among others when he was in charge of the regional research program at UNRISD (United Nations Research Institute for Social Development) in Geneva. It is therefore not surprising that the book devotes space to that question. He claims that regional policy must answer a fundamental question, namely how effective it is as an instrument to transform European space. (p. 250.) Here we have an example where the apocalypse is absent and only the positive is stressed with the identification of specific research priorities in order to create a “new regionalism” that will lead into a new model of regional policy (252).

My friend and good colleague Roman Galar writes in an afterword of the volume “With his characteristic mixture of erudition and emotion Kuklinski adds substance to the seemingly funny observation that the future is no longer what it used to be” ((323). He rightly points out that all the papers in the volume reflect the author’s original and indomitable personality, his life’s passions and his unique ability to pressure people into action.’ (325). I could not have said it better.

I was in Warsaw participating in one of Antoni’s splendid, entertaining, substantive and sometimes surrealistic conferences when we celebrated his 80th birthday. And now we have before us a volume at the occasion of his 85th birthday! When most people would enjoy their retirement and go fishing in the country side, Antoni struggles on in his fight to avoid the apocalypse, to identify the dangers as the world goes through one of those crucial transition periods, and to come up with strategies to maintain the Atlantic Community, the strength of Western civilization (including maintaining the best of Poland’s traditions, culture, and economy) without hindering the rise of other players on the world scene. And if that were not enough the chapters are written in a flowery language with references to Antiquity, the Middle Ages, and to the best of contemporary thinkers and writers.

I wish that every country or region could have such a much needed personality like Antoni Kuklinski who is truly one of Poland’s and Europe’s treasures and visionaries. I am happy that he just cannot quit stimulating thinking in his country and on the world stage at large in order to warn us about the dangers that lurk around the corner. I am looking forward to the volume (an amendment to his first testament) that will celebrate his 90th birthday with articles written between 2010 and 2017.

Paris – Washington DC, April 2014.

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