

# THE LOSS OF IDEAL AND PRIVACY | Editorial

*K & K* celebrates its twentieth anniversary for the second time thanks to the overwhelming number of authors who recommended and commented on texts that had influenced them greatly. Not all managed to select a single text. “It is a task for gods...,” writes Martin Butora. The majority of texts in this issue are rather long, hence sometimes we had to shorten them or chose, after agreeing with the contributor, a different text from the same author as was the case with Ivan Štrpka (Borges) or Will Mullins (Cassirer).

The longest text is by Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor from 1991. Certainly, we did not shorten that one. We publish it for the first time in its original English version. First, Professor Taylor first wrote it for the Viennese journal *Transit* where it was published in a German translation. According to the editor of *Transit*, Klaus Nellen, who recommended the article, Taylor asked for a copy of the English version some time in 1995, for he had lost his electronic copy. Nellen had only a printed copy and transcribing it was complicated since scanning had not been invented yet. So, a quarter century after it was written, it is published in English and Slovak in *Kritika & Kontext*.

Although Taylor’s essay reacted to the historical changes after the fall of Communist regimes, it has lost none of its insights today. He warns against a premature euphoria and was rightly concerned about the return of demons of the past. A political regime falls in a few days, the human mindset changes over decades, and the demons always return, in conscious or subconscious states. So many are disillusioned with today’s developments in countries where the arrival of democratic regimes after 1989 was greeted with joyful tears in the eyes. The jubilant masses sincerely believed that, in Havel’s words, “truth and goodness overcome lies and hatred.” It did not happen. Cynics might claim that it was a false belief. Surely, every political euphoria in history has been only a transient and short-lived episode.

A society without ideals enters a vegetative, aimless state and gradual decline as has been the case of all great civilizations. Paradoxically, on the one hand, liberal thinkers are aware of the danger of ‘searching for an ideal’ and realize, as argued by Berlin, many contradictory ideals while, at the same time confront those who guard their particular ideal, by force if necessary. That is the reason that one of the definition of liberalism, as stated by John Gray, is that a liberal democracy—a regime respecting human rights, protecting freedom while seeking justice—should not have an end, a final destination where the end might justify any means towards that end. Human beings tend to be impatient and are ready at times of crisis and decay to use force to speed up the revolution and “end history” so they could witness the goal achieved, the euphoria of the illusory ideal. Often, they are willing to destroy anything in this world in order to save their place in eternity.

On the other hand, liberals must come to terms with the realization that a decline of values, aimlessness, a loss of empathy towards the other, compensated through consumer culture and being frustrated by unimportant banalities, paralyzes society while human existence ceases to have meaning.

Charles Taylor, the greatest living philosopher, has long been aware of the pluses and minuses of liberalism and for decades he professed Communitarianism as an outlook to amend the deficiencies of liberal democracy. Moreover, in his latest masterwork, The Secular Age (2007), he stresses the importance of faith to face our time and sees in religion a possible answer to questions whose exact formulation we in our 'secular age' might not even know.

I am glad that, thanks to the recommendation of Iveta Radičová, we publish an excerpt from by now classic text on democracy by Anthony Giddens. Equally interesting is a recommendation by the Serbian philosopher Obrad Savić who selected quotations from a book by Peter Sloterdijk about the status of rage in the human psyche and its consequences on public life. Carl Henrik Friedriksson—a longtime editor-in-chief of European cultural internet journal [www.eurozine.com](http://www.eurozine.com), at whose foundation *K&K* was present—recommended an article presented at a Eurozine conference in Vilnius in 2009 by the at that time still relatively unknown historian Timothy Snyder. This groundbreaking lecture to some extent propelled him to the position today of being a foremost public intellectual.

In this issue, I again recommend a text by Milan Kundera from his book, Betrayed Testaments. His thoughts about the need to protect individual privacy sound today almost prophetic. The loss of privacy devastates not only an individual but, as we see in the case of the USA and EU, undermines the foundations of liberal democracy.

At the end, you might be pleased to see photographs from *Kritika*'s history, humorous correspondence with Kornel Földvari, a sample of precious postcards of Ludvík Vaculík or a few texts from *Kritika*'s archive that, for various reasons, never found their way to be published in *Kritika*.

SAMUEL ABRAHÁM