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Faculty of "Artes Liberales"

University of Warsaw

Nowy Świat 69

Conference Room, 4th floor

BEYOND

ECONOMICS

Humanists tackle the Greek crisis

Transcription of the debate

Natalia Obukowicz:

Welcome to the debate on Greek crisis. The current crisis is believed to be a crisis of economy as a discipline that failed to predict, understand and solve our economic problems. We decided to organize a debate to see if using humanistic approach can be of any help in achieving this tasks. In the first part of our meeting, we will present three discussion starters in which we will try to tackle the crisis from the perspective of our discipline. Kamil as an anthropologist will speak about the crisis of trust, Ewa as a specialist in cultural studies will speak about the crisis of the image of Greeks and their self-identification and finally myself as a literary scholar, I will talk about the crisis related discourse. We hope that we will provoke an exchange between all the humanists gathered here and that we will try to tackle the crisis from different humanistic perspectives. Let our debate start from here.

Kamil Wielecki (presentation 1):

At the beginning I want to tell you a story of Charles Ponzi. Ponzi was an Italian immigrant who in 1903 came to the United States. He had 2,5 dollars in his pocket but – as he later told in a press interview – he had millions of dollars in his hopes. In 1919 he found a brilliant idea how to fulfill his dreams. Namely, he acknowledged the existence of International Reply Coupon system. What was that? Let us say, if a company in Italy sent a letter to the US and wanted to receive an answer, it attached a coupon to the letter. This coupon could be exchanged for a usual post stamp on the spot. These coupons were much cheaper in Italy, Spain and other European countries than in the US. So what Ponzi did was buying coupons in Italy and selling them in the US. In order to do that, he started to borrow money and he promised his lenders big interest rates in return. Later he even stopped buying coupons because for some bureaucratic reasons it was difficult to do it on massive scale. He just kept borrowing money. His system worked basically according to the rule "robbing Peter to pay Paul" where one participant gets paid by contributions from other participants. In this way, by July 1920 Ponzi became a millionaire. However, afterwards his life was not so successful as he got imprisoned.

Why am I telling you this story? Because capitalism is as a matter of fact based on Ponzi's scheme. It is a pyramid scheme which needs credit in order to develop. Credit and debt are intrinsically linked to the capitalistic system. Everything is fine until credit is kept in reasonable measures and economic growth allows you to pay your debts off. What we saw in 2008 was a fall of pyramid scheme, it was a bubble burst in the American real estate market.

Nevertheless, my point is that this crisis is particular. The 2008 crisis was not just a fall of a pyramid. The first thing is the size of this crisis. The American public debt reached the level of 100% of Global Domestic Product of this country. Actually, it is easier to say than to imagine how much money it is. It is around 16 trillions dollars – this is the value of all goods and services produced in the US during an entire year. It makes the US the most indebted country in the history. So this crisis is the crisis of enormous debt.

The second thing is the scale of this crisis: it is global. If a country like Serbia or Ukraine has problems, nobody cares. If Greece is in trouble, the European Union is in trouble too. But if the US have problems, then the entire planet has problems because the US are the biggest world's economy. So if I would have to look for the roots of this crisis it would not be Greece but the US.

The first thesis I want to make is that this crisis is not only about debt and not only about economics. According to the economic knowledge, the inflation rate in the US should be around 20%. The reason of it is the “quantitative easing” policy performed by the Federal Reserve which is a kind of American national bank. “Quantitative easing” or “loosening of monetary policy” means simply printing money. You can do that and it has even some advantages, but it inevitably leads to the rise of inflation. But the inflation rate in the US is actually at the level of 1% which is very low. I don't want to go into economic details but it is like that because East-Asian countries, mainly China and Japan, still buy American bonds, thus they are financing the American debt. They do it, although they know that in the nearest future the value of dollar must decrease, so they will lose huge amounts of money. So the situation is really in a deadlock and it seems that the crisis cannot be resolved only by economics means, mainly because of the very fact that the main actors on the stage do not want to resolve it – they do not have common remedies for it.

The second thesis I want to put forward is that this is the crisis of trust. Trust is something about relationships – relationships between people, between individuals and institutions, between citizens and state. This fundamental lack of trust resulted from the lack of certainty. Things that used to be certain before stopped being like that now. In our times you cannot be sure about getting a job, your pension in retirement time or your deposit in the bank. No state can be safe because of the global scale of the phenomenon I have already talked about. The crisis can attack very quickly and particular countries are too weak to defend themselves. This was the case of the rapid fall of Greece. All of a sudden Portugal, Spain and Ireland are on sale, too.

Trust is something easy to lose but very difficult to build. What we see now are dissolutions of different associations and treaties. Particular countries try to solve the crisis on their own. We observe also a rise of different populisms. I think it was well presented by Victoria Stoiciu in her article I attached to my hand-out (“Lazy Greeks, a neo-liberal cliché” in *Criticatac*, 13 February 2012). She writes about the growth of nationalist populisms on the one hand, and neo-liberal populism on the other hand. My point is that in the conditions of this atomization, resolving the crisis by technical measures becomes impossible.

So the question is: what can humanists and social scientists do about it? Does their opinion matter at all? I leave these questions open.

Ewa Róża Janion (presentation 2):

Let me start from some rhetorical questions: According to you, was the passion for vodka responsible for the Rubel crisis in 1998? Did American lifestyle caused the housing bubble in America in 2007? Not really? So, why the laziness of Greeks should be the reason for the Greek crisis?

In this speech I am going to elaborate on this serious matter, but I will start from an anecdote: during a spring weekend, I was biking through the Egina Island. Unfortunately, a friend of mine had an accident while we were passing by a small village Mesargos in the interior of the island. Almost immediately, the inhabitants of the village made a rush to help bringing water, bags of ice, etc. Among them, there was an elderly gentleman from Crete who brought a bottle of tsipuro,

a local vodka, and told my friend to drink it because “even in a harsh situation a man must be a man”. When we were ready to continue our journey, the Cretan gentleman told us: “When you go back to Europe, just tell people that Greeks are good. I know that Angela Merkel tries to persuade everyone that Greeks are evil, but go there and say that we are good”.

This strange request made me think about the problem of Greek image in Europe. It seems that this side of the Greek crisis is equally important to Greeks as its purely economic aspect.

Actually a similar story was narrated by Lord Byron. Lord Byron arrived to Greece for the first time in 1809. Because of a storm on the Ionian Sea, the poet and his companions arrived soaked and shipwrecked. To the travellers' astonishment, they were offered help by local “barbarians” - as the Greek inhabitants of Albania were often called in these times. But the most surprising thing for Byron was that Suliots did not want any remuneration or reward, just a good word passed to the local authorities. Byron was so shocked by their attitude that he described it in a letter to his mother, written almost immediately afterwards, while after some years the encounter with Suliots became a landmark of his travel poem, “Childe Harold's Pilgrimage” and was described explicitly in the notes:

Not a week ago an Albanian chief after helping us, feeding us, and lodging my suite [...] refused any compensation but a written paper stating that I was well received; and when I pressed him to accept a few sequins. "No," he replied; "I wish you to love me, not to pay me" These are his words.

Therefore, it was observed many times – by both Greeks and foreigners - that Greeks care excessively about their image abroad. Greeks want to be loved. I would like to propose to take a look on this problem from a diachronic perspective, that is to show when this image of Greeks was created and how it evolved in accordance to the political and economic situation in Europe.

Yet, in order to explain it, one must remember philhellenes. Before the 19th century philhellenism, Europe was basically disinterested in the contemporary Greeks. Only when the Napoleonic Wars broke out in the Italian Peninsula, the travellers could not go to Rome any more in order to see the antique. As a result, they started travelling to Athens. Then a certain vision of the Greek people was imported from Athens to Western Europe, described in the relations, travelogues and memoirs read enthusiastically by the public.

What image did philhellenes import? In short, it was a positive image of the Rousseauque noble savages embellished with their ancient origins. Philhellenes' Greeks were cunning, proud, strong, living close to nature, absolutely free because unbound by social order. Moreover, they were somehow ambivalent, arrogant and hot tempered, moulded according to the paradigm of Byronic “flawed hero”. Last but not least, many Westerners visiting Greece extolled Greek robbers whose image was stylized according to the myth of social bandits, who like Robin Hood robbed the rich (i.e. the government) and gave to the poor (like themselves).

Without any doubts, this image was the cultural construction of its times, prepared to meet the expectations of contemporary English readers. Indeed, the romantic audience loved it, the philhellenic literature flourished, the Greek tourism and European entertainment industry developed. Glasses were getting broken, Capitan Corelli's mandolin was playing, Alexis Zorba was dancing on the beach.

Yet, how long was he dancing? For a long time, I suppose. In Romanticism, Greece started to be placed on the margins of Europe, keeping balance between what is familiar and alien. As the successors of the ancient tradition, Greeks were Europeans but as mountain bandits they were strangers. The Accession to the European Union (1981) made Greeks more familiar, more “ours”: the discourse about the cradle of Europe returned; politicians claimed that Europe rejoined its roots. However, the most important factor of changing European attitude Greece was the accession to the Eurozone (2002) and establishing the close economic partnership between the states. At this point the internalisation of Greece got too far. When the crisis broke out, suddenly Europe became the

bad rich guy from whom the Greek Robin Hoods steal money. One may observe that Robin Hood is a nice and friendly hero as long as Sherwood Forest lies far enough.

This change of attitude is clearly shown by the infographic published by VideoInfographs.com and available on YouTube. In this outlook the Greek public debt is blamed on Greek people, yet it is presented as the problem of European states, not of the Greeks. According to this information, Greeks happily benefit from the situation enjoying the huge salaries, doing nothing and retiring incredibly early at the expense of hard working Germans and French people. The cover of "The Economist" from May 2010 strikes the same note. The title "Acropolis Now" as well as the layout alludes to the Francis F. Coppola's movie suggesting that Angela Merkel has been sent to a far, wild country in order to tame its uncivilized inhabitants.

Thus, my perverse hypothesis is that philhellenism is paradoxically the source of today's negative stereotypes. The once romantic, positive image later turned against Greeks because through the time the valuing has changed. From relaxed and laid back, Greeks became lazy, from life-loving they became hedonists disregarding the future, from cunning – cheaters, from noble savages – simply savages.

Yet, these were Europeans who created for their own use a kind of nostalgic asylum of fun and adventure, which must be kept away from their own business. Recently the distance became too close. In the present situation there are only two solutions: either "Grexit", sending them back to Asia, or the intensive and painful course of German discipline.

Just to finish, let's ask how Greeks themselves see the situation. "The pampered children of philhellenism" (I. Wrazas) feel hurt and disappointed. Immediately after the outburst of philhellenism, they believed in foreign thinkers' claims stating that Greeks are the chosen people, paradigms of bravery and liberty, and they were reaping the benefits from this long lasting positive image. Yet, now they have to deal with its reversal. This change is due purely to the external reasons, it does not depend on Greeks themselves. Moreover, now and 200 years ago, Greeks would like to create their own image for exportation. Yet, now and then, it seems impossible. This is the philhellenic curse, we may say.

Natalia Obukowicz (presentation 3):

I would like to concentrate on the very discourse related to Greek crisis. I became interested in the press discourse in European Union and in Greece. During my little investigation, it occurred to me that the discourse of the European press can be summed up with the cover of "The Economist" evoked by Ewa:



We see there a well known scene from Coppola's movie with flames and helicopters invading a peaceful land. In short, European press is prophetising the Apocalypse.

In the meantime, Greek press seems longing for the blissful past and deploring the decline. The fragment of an article says:

Gone are the days of going out and shopping,
trouble-free travel and early evening drinks
in outdoor cafes. Bills and surgery have been postponed,
and no more private tuition for the kids.
Laid-low by the crisis, Greeks have learned
to rein in their lifestyles, and everyday living in the country
has become a sad affair".

(« Life in a time of Troika » in VIMA ATHENS, 1 June 2011)

We have here an image of the capitalistic paradise where the universal happiness was at hand because we could buy everything we wanted and now we are deprived of this power. These images fit curiously to the traditional lament songs that were written since the 14th century until Greek War of Independence. These songs were telling the story of Turkish invasion through the description of the disastrous changes in Greek daily life. In these songs, Western forces (“The Franks”) were called upon to help the helpless country and the messengers were sent to ask for rescue. The quoted article “Life in a time of Troika” is using the similar scheme although “Western forces” are already there with their rescue program of economic restrictions that are quite similar to the Turkish oppression. The article is ending with an intriguing sentence: “[...] and figures are there to prove it” as if numbers and percentages were attached as an illustration or as if economic terms were just an ornament to the traditional lamentation.

In the beginning I said that the current crisis is seen also as the crisis of the economic discourse. In fact, the appeal of the economic discourse was clearly based on its almost prophetic capacities. In a capitalistic society, the economy was a kind of a “rational oracle”. We can see it in the way we now talk about certain economists. We distinguish false economic prophets who failed to understand the truth and those who were predicting the catastrophe since a long time like Joseph E. Stiglitz, a Nobel-Prize winner. Yet, Simon Critchley in his article “Euro blind” (*The New York Times*, November 21, 2011) wrote that Europe was like Oedipus who heard the oracle but did all the things that he should avoid because he was warned about them. This remark made me ask myself several questions: What can be understood from the fact that economic press is singing an old song about the fall? What is the function of lamentation? How can the discourse analysis be used to better understand the crisis?

In order to answer these questions, I would like to refer to the etymology of the word “crisis” which means “judgment” is Greek. In the Bible, this word is used to designate God's judgment leading to salvation or damnation. Through the process of semantic contamination, it started to point to a certain moment in time. For instance, in Aristotelian theory of tragedy, the crisis means a peak moment before things get resolved. This moment in the tragedy was preceded by a so called *kommós*, a lamentation song performed by actors and chorus altogether. Its function was to express grief but also to make decisions that push things forward. I would therefore claim that the lamentation is a moment when the shift of perspective occurs: still grieving the past we are creating the future. We find ourselves in the peak moment before a new reality emerges.

Ewa Róża Janion:

We presented three different approaches to the problem of Greek crisis and drew different conclusions. For Kamil the Greek crisis is first of all a part of a bigger, wider phenomenon, while for me the Greek case is particular because of the unique experience of philhellenism, which concerns only the Greek nation. Last, for Natalia the crisis is universal, it is always the same story. What unites our approaches is the belief that the crisis should be tackled by the humanists, because the economic studies cannot explain it fully and in all its complexity.

We would like to start the debate from the very general issue of the nature of the crisis: is this crisis particular, or is it just a slump that always follows the periods of economic growth? What your field of expertise can add to the ongoing debate about the crisis in general, and about the Greek crisis in particular?

Olimpia Dragouni:

You referred the three approaches and I have some ideas which could possibly combine them. My academic background as a European studies graduate also has something to do here and a half-Greek part of my origin as well. I appreciate a lot Kamil's statement about the distrust. I agree with you that this is the core of some problems that today's Europe experiences. However, I would see the Greeks as victims of colonialism, also in the 19th century. I perceive this image of Greeks and emerging Greece to be an effect of some international games played by big imperia. And today's image of Greeks I see also as a result of colonialism, which is useful mainly for the European Union and maybe for Germany, but not to such extent as Greek press hysterically likes to present it. I would like to stress that I do not agree with most of Greek representations of Germany and of Angela Merkel as a second Nazi figure. This is ridiculous and this image is an oversimplification. However, there were some voices in Greece raised that Greece was only the first country to fall in Europe, which was later on proved by the case of Spain and Portugal, and the case of Cyprus.

This situation started many years ago when already in 1997 the new regulations concerning convergence criteria were introduced. European Union meant to introduce Euro, but everybody knew that Greece could never fulfil these criteria. They changed them, so that Greece could fit into them.

Thus, if that was the case, everybody knew that the Greek economy was already weak. The crisis that would come later on was already on air. This is the problem: we have the economic knowledge and then the social discourse about Greeks, which is in my opinion following again the economic requirements. I really have this view of the present image of Greeks being constructed in order to justify economic measures which were introduced in Athens. I am not saying that Greek economy didn't need improvements, but I see biases made by media, by politicians, by thinkers, which are simply suiting the political, economic line of the strongest countries in the European Union.

Answering the question about the cooperation between the economists and social scientists: I doubt if it is possible. Do the scientists have any power to be listened and heard by the economists and the people who really decide?

Kamil Wielecki:

You touched a very important point – the advantage of politics over the economy. This is true that Greeks cheated the data, the statistics they sent to Europe, but on the other hand those who pretended to believe in these lies are guilty to the same extent. We can tackle the problem from many perspectives.

Przemyslaw Kordos:

I found the presentations very provocative, I couldn't seat still when I was listening to them. Ewa, I missed one image in your line of thought. You talked about klefts, the independent warriors, about the modern image of the lazy Greek, but there is one person missing, very important – Zorba the Greek.

Philhellenism is reduced to the academic discourse both in the Greek conscience and in the foreign one. The klefts now are a legend which was misused by the civil war. I wouldn't say they have any impact on the image of Greeks now. Unlike Zorba the Greek. I remind you that this is not only the film with Anthony Quinn, but also the book of Nikos Kazantzakis.

When we think about Zorba the Greek, what image do we have? A careless man who does what he likes and who has three themes in his life: wine, women and song, as he says himself. But I would say that Zorba the Greek is one of the most negative influences in modern Greek history. Nobody made so many bad things to the Greek nation as Zorba the Greek. Why? Because now people see Greeks as Zorbas and, what is more, a lot of Greek people to some extent see themselves as Zorbas.

I was in Cyprus last week and I can tell you that the number of restaurants that are named "Zorba" is twenty. It is absolutely paradoxical. This is how they want us to see them in a way, but this is a lie upon a lie. When you look at the film it is so shallower than the book itself. The film is as bad to the book as Zorba to the Greek nation

Kazantzakis created the hero who is not flat, he is not a healthy man who does not care. Zorba has two sides, one is "sea, sand, sun, let's dance, let's forget about everything". But this is the joy before death. This is the joy of a man standing on the very verge of chaos. This part of Greek image is completely misunderstood by foreigners.

Greek contemporary culture is at its basis very sad. There was a very nice interview with Zygmunt Kubiak some years ago entitled "Why are the Greeks sad?". This is the key, one of the most important ways to read the Greek image. When I hear these opinions that Greeks are lazy, they just drink frappe and don't work, I can't do anything but laugh. This is an image created only on deceptive prepositions without understanding anything deep about Greek people.

Natalia, I really like the idea that the press is very naïve as old lament songs. But I also think that the press knows very well that the apocalypse sells. We like to read about the apocalypse and to watch it. Let's have a quick look on what is shown now in the movie theaters: "The Road" written by Cormac McCarthy and the film released four years ago, then "Cloud Atlas" - a very big blockbuster. Now "Oblivion" with Tom Cruise, "After Earth" with Will Smith, and soon (I invite you to see it, it's going to be good) "World War Z" about the world overcome by Zombies. So, we like apocalypse, there is something I wouldn't say pleasant, but thrilling, in this feeling when we know that tomorrow we will not wake up. It is not just a lament song. I think it is more universal than just Greek. Anyway, you should not take it out of your equation that apocalypse is fun.

Please remember that some part of Greek modern history is looking for conspiracies, especially after the World War II. There is a famous phrase in Greek language "Ksenodaktilo" which means "a foreign finger" – I can give you a long list of publications, some of them really demoniac, which explain how some Greeks perceive it. There is a very strong shade in presenting modern Greek history. What does it have to do with the crisis? Well, some people say: "Huh! We told you so! We have been writing about it for years". And it works, there are people outside Greece who actually shape Greeks' lives.

And just to finish up with something not Greek: We can compare how Greeks and Cypriot people live the crisis. Greece and Cyprus are culturally connected on levels that are completely absurd, for instance Cypriot children have the same school books as the Greek children and the national anthem of Cyprus is the Greek anthem. But the way they live the crisis is very different and it was visible from the very beginning. What did Greeks do? Greeks went out on the streets. What happened in Cyprus? The protests lasted for a week and the government did what the citizens

wanted. They had a first proposal of cutting all the savings, and then they decided not to do it, to cut just a part of it, and save the common people. I was in Cyprus last week and I can tell you there are no signs of crisis.

Piotr Wilczek:

I should mention now what I wanted to mention because Przemek quoted Apocalypse and Armageddon. I am not sure if you know that there is a special investment fund established by a quite famous economist, professor Krzysztof Rybiński, which is named “Eurogeddon”. The idea of this investment fund is that people who invest will make profit when Greece gets bankrupt. This is a kind of combination, I don’t know the details. I just tried to follow the headlines of his publications about Greece. What I am really surprised by is how aggressive they are. These articles should be studied by psychologists of economy... This is a strong evidence that we need humanists who are also involved in analysing the crisis. I will just quote a few titles translated into English: “Greeks will gobble the money”; “Greece is on the break of war”; “Ruined country – Greece”; “Greek bankruptcy in 2013 is probable”; “Will Greece go bankrupt after the elections in Germany?”; “Greece must fall”; “We will make money on the bankruptcy of Greece” “Why Greece should go bankrupt”; “Greece will return to the drachma”; “Heal for Greece is not the end of trouble but the continuation of agony”; “The patient is getting worse”; “Greece continues to haunt like a Zombie”. Rybiński’s announcements about Greece which appear almost every day in Polish newspapers and television, are all like this. It is an interesting phenomenon. I always thought that economists were scientists. But this is a completely irrational, very aggressive justification of “Eurogeddon”. I have never read before such an aggressive announcement about any country. I am just wondering what is the reason of such an aggression of this particular guy.

Paweł Miech:

I have a comment to Kamil. I think there is a paradox in your presentation or perhaps this is just my impression. On the one hand you say that the crisis can be investigated by humanities, by the cultural anthropology in your case, this is probably obvious and we all agree on that. There is nothing really controversial about this claim. Then, on the other hand you seem to suggest that the lifestyle of Greeks and cultural context of Greek society is somehow not responsible for the crisis. I guess that the overall suggestion that emerges from the discussion points in direction that the Greek lifestyle and Greek culture should not be blamed, that we tend to demonize the Greeks.

So, if this is the case, if the lifestyle or culture of Greece is not the cause of the crisis, what other causes cultural anthropology can find?

You were talking about trust, but I am not convinced by this explanation. It has been in air for a long time, since the beginning of the crisis. The whole idea of trust appeared in multiple publications, yet it does not explain really anything. I think this is an element of irrational utopia as well. You can ask a simple question: if there is a crisis of trust, why a particular country is affected by the economic crisis? Why Greece and why not Germany, for instance? If there is a general problem with trust overall everywhere, why Greece is affected and not some other country?

I think that the answer for this question must somehow refer to internal reasons, to way Greek economy functions. You investigate this field in your research about Russia as well, the junction between the economy and culture.

To conclude, I think that we don’t have to use stereotypes to discuss the lifestyle or culture. We don’t really have to bother about stupid, aggressive clichés, which appear in all those discussions. There are notions in cultural anthropology which can explain the problems in question in more objective way, like for instance the idea of shadow economy. The percentage of hidden economy in Greece is much higher than in other countries. According to the estimations, there is a 27% of economy shadowed in Greece and in Germany it is only 15%.

Another factor is called 'tax morale' – I didn't get deep into the methodology, I can't say exactly how tax morale is measured, but somehow those researches show that the level of tax morale in Greece is much lower than in other countries, for instance for Denmark it is 4%, and for Greece 10% - the higher the factor, the worse morale there is. Don't you think there are some rational arguments which explain the cultural roots of the crisis in Greece? Don't you think that these factors can be discussed without falling into those really naïve and stupid cliché of laziness, and others?

Kamil Wielecki:

That was a really dense comment and you raised a lot of questions. When somebody explains the problem by culture, that is where my work begins. If you say the crisis in Greece resulted from the Greek culture, it is not very elucidating and you need to investigate further. Moreover, I would be afraid of falling into stereotypes concerning national characters claiming for instance that Germans are punctual and Greeks are lazy. My intention wasn't to justify Greeks; of course there are internal problems in this economy. My intention was to show that Greece was affected externally and that the crisis was exported to Greece. I really think that the question of trust is of core meaning – maybe you find it too abstract.

You can measure trust like the tax morale and the shadow economy. You can ask people: "Do you trust the members of your family?", "Do you trust the president Komorowski", and so on. There are also other ways you can measure trust. Namely, there is a big literature on the decrease of social trust in the United States. For instance, around 25% of American Labour Market consists of different guard services, as the police, private guards and so on. Before you didn't need to guard your home or your children so much. I think you don't need it even now, but the atmosphere and the pictures showed by the media are so terrible that you start to be afraid. Before people could settle their arguments between them. Now in the United States and in Europe as well, the neighbours are suing each other. By the way, such lack of trust may be paradoxically perceived as good for the economy. If you pay the lawyer to settle your argument, it is very costly, but makes the economy grow.

Jacek Raszewski:

First of all, I am extremely happy that this event is taking place and that I have the opportunity to be a part of it. I am thankful for the invitation. I have a small remark to Ms. Obukowicz's speech. It goes in the line of Przemysław Kordos. We are talking about the crisis and there is an assumption that we know what we are talking about. There were a lot of crises in the world. We are talking about the crisis that started in 2007 in the sub-prime mortgage market in the USA and it blew up some financial institutions in Europe.

If we look at the crisis related discourse in Greece the suggestion would be that the crisis that caused several disturbances in the global economy affected Greece, so the crisis related discourse is a response to this crisis. Everyone who travels to Greece from time to time knows that in Greece there are strikes and riots. Me myself since 1999 I visited Greece frequently. It is not a very long time, but it is enough to illustrate what I am talking about. Very quickly I learned to take into consideration the fact that there may be a strike at the university, in public services and so on. This conviction of Greek people that there is something wrong with the state, with the way things are in Greece, is much older than the crisis we are talking about. I think it would be interesting to see how the discourse related to the crisis has changed during the global crisis. My point is that this discourse existed before the burst out of the global crisis but has changed during this crisis.

My research on this topic is not very advanced, so I just wanted to give you a small example. In 2009 the PASOK won elections. Georgios Papandreu, its leader, was therefore about to become the prime minister. However, he was probably very sad and terrified at this moment. Why?

How the PASOK won the elections? Papandreu had traveled around Greece and explained people that there is money: “We have plenty of cash, we have so much money that our problems are irrelevant. It is only a matter of taking money from one pocket and putting it to another”. What happened the day after the elections? One of the prominent PASOK politicians appeared in television and said: “It is obvious that nobody keeps all the promises after elections, but in the given circumstances we will keep none of them”. What are these circumstances? There was money, but there is none. Who is to blame for this situation? Of course Néa Dimokratía is to blame as usual, but now there is a new factor, too – there is a global economic crisis. From then on Papandreu followed this line blaming Néa Dimokratía and global economic crisis. He stressed also that there are no simple solutions for this situation. This was something very new in Greek public discourse, I think. What I am saying is that the discourse related to the crisis is nothing new in Greece, it is just a new phase of the same phenomenon.

Steven Conn:

I am a historian from Ohio State University. We have been living here in Warsaw for the last 5 months. I am not an economist although I do usually play one when I write for newspapers, so I have no expertise to offer in this direction. I do want to say thank you very much for having Angela [Brintlinger] and me as part of this discussion. It is really fascinating and I think from the very outset there have been a whole set of provocative questions raised. I guess, I should also take this moment to – on behalf of 300 million Americans – to apologize for the 2007 meltdown. I would say though that one of the things that have been interesting from the other side of Atlantic is that the response to this meltdown has been different in ways which, I think, historians will look back on and find significant. Whereas austerity has been the rule of the European response that was not the case in the US, at least it was not the case initially beginning in 2007 and through 2010-2011. The enormous economic stimulus package that was passed by the American Congress is now – most economists would agree – credited with keeping the American economy from really dropping to the floor. So while we shared the crisis we did not necessarily follow the same path in response to it. I think it might be interesting to think about.

I love the title of this seminar because I certainly do think that humanists have something to offer here. I'm sorry Piotr [Wilczek] that you discovered that economists are not actually real scientists, they just use a lot of very fancy equations to pretend that they are. But looking from the US, since so far it is the topic of discussion, what Americans notice is that this is a political problem. Ultimately the economics are the window dressing around the set of political choices that have to be made. Even though the American system is no model of political efficiency, the Eurozone looks to Americans politically dysfunctional. That the European Central Banks can't make the same kinds of responses that the American Central Bank can because of the architecture of the European Union and the Eurozone. I think that comes even at the local level that there is a political dysfunction in some of these individual countries; failure to address honestly that kinds of conditions and therefore evaluate the choices we really have. The cliché goes that politics is simply the art of what is possible. So the question I want to really throw back at the organizers here is – what do you think – the humanities have to offer that either helps us choose from what is now possible politically or which offer us a choice not given on the table.

Kamil Wielecki:

Thank you very much, Professor Conn. I think, I am not able to answer your questions now. Let us hear other voices and maybe the question will appear in between. We have been saying a lot about Greece, but maybe we should give space for real Greeks, too. Anna, would you give us a comment?

Anna Stratoudaki:

Thank you very much for inviting me for this debate. I am not an expert so I do not know what you guys will get out of my participation. I do not even know how to comment on the Greek financial crisis, it is not my field of expertise. Even though if you go to small village in the forests in Greece now and ask an old lady what she thinks about the economics in Greece and how the economic model should look like, you would probably get an answer. I think this is something I should not do.

Simultaneously to the financial crisis the image crisis exists. I wanted to say that this crisis is very dangerous because it affects our lives and it is feeding the financial crisis too. Firstly, it affects tourism and as you know Greece is a country which is based on tourism. Nobody wants to come to the country where lazy, vandal and corrupted people live. The second reason would be that the decisions that are made for Greece in Europe are based on these wrong images so they can't be right. The third reason and the worst for me is that Greek people have actually believed in these stereotypes concerning their image. There are Greeks that have accepted it. Some of you said that the stereotype of Zorba the Greek has been considered to be a good image because at the end this is who we are. As the group – the group that made the video you've seen [The Omikron Project] – we don't believe this is true and we are trying to do something to change it even though the Greek government doesn't seem to acknowledge the problem.

The last thing I wanted to say is something everyone should consider when thinking why the Greek crisis is so popular and why Greece is in the middle of everything. I think, one word would be scapegoating. I'm saying this because scapegoating is something that people do in general. It is something that we Greeks do to these poor immigrants that are coming here. Somehow the Greek people have been convinced that it is here where lies the reason for their misery now. The same way as people from stronger European countries... I think they are actually living the crisis themselves in their own way, they have scapegoated Greece in order to find the reason for their problems, for the measures and politics that have to be implied. So perhaps scapegoating should not be an answer to our problems.

Krzysztof Skonieczny:

I have a comment that probably is more abstract than looking for those who are to blame and it goes a bit in the line for searching for the meaning of the word "crisis". I will not talk about Greece in ways you have talked. It struck me that in a way both in Ewa's and Natalia's presentations I could find little pieces of discourse that would treat either Greeks or the whole multifocal question of Greeks vs. Europe as animals. Ewa said that Greeks were first depicted as beautiful savages – as the animals that are wild, and because they are wild they are beautiful. And we – we as Europe – want to incorporate them into our European *polis*, which is by the way a Greek word. When they are far away they are beautiful and we enjoy watching them. When we incorporate them and especially when we have problems, we start to give them the choice – you would either stop being who you are and who you were as those beautiful animals or we will expel you. It is as if we were trying to make the animal Greeks, who we love, human. Imagine Greeks are tigers and we are a goat-herding folk who happens to love wild animals. We know that tigers eat goats, but if this is the cost of having the beautiful tigers close to us, then we're willing to take it – we have a lot of goats. But the situation changes – for one reason or another we have fewer and fewer goats, and the tigers are a natural species to blame. Also, their excessive goat-eating becomes a problem. So we can tell them – either become man (and stop eating goats, though that will mean losing what we found attractive in them in the first place) or get out of our land.

On the other hand, in Natalia's presentation there was this view of economy as something rational. This is a strange rationality or the strange rationale like the rationality of evolution or

sociobiology. In this story everybody is an animal but Greeks are the weaker animals. They are lazy, they don't want to take part in this game of being austere, of imposing this difficult situation upon ourselves in order to survive. So their choice is that either they will endure the hardships of survival or they will have to just exit. So crisis – as Natalia said – is judgment. It receives double meaning: on the one hand it is the unnatural or the cultural selection between man and animal. The Greeks will have to choose – to be themselves and to remain animals, so they will be expelled or they will have to choose to be humans, so turn into something they are not. On the other hand there is a natural selection when we think about the crisis as something like the natural disaster that just happens. And in natural way – I think it is the way Rybiński thinks pretty much – they are the weaker animals and it is the way of nature that the weaker animals, when a drought or another natural disaster comes, they will be naturally expelled, they will just die out making the rest of animals stronger. So crisis is either a cultural selection or natural selection within the same narration about it.

Ines Steger:

I have just a short comment. I am from Germany and I have a feeling that I have to speak up being probably the only German person here. I am not an expert in this crisis and I have not been in Germany for the last months or even years so much. I am also not sure if I am supposed to apologize on behalf of all Germans.

I think a very interesting point in our debate today is the talk about discourse which maybe has an influence on crisis or how things develop. I just wanted to make some remarks concerning the discourse I heard in the part of Germany I lived or among my friends. I think it strongly changed throughout the years. At the beginning I had the feeling that there were many voices blaming these lazy Greeks – as we were saying – but also there were many people who wanted to somehow support Greek economy by going there on holidays and to bring money to the country. Now if you write in Google “atmosphere crisis” in German you will get many articles how strained is the atmosphere in Greece. I found also many articles that Germans are not so much going on holiday to Greece anymore because we read in the media that Germans are treated negatively when going there – and of course it has a negative influence on Greek tourism. I think, for many people it is not the feeling that Greeks are lazy and unorganized that makes people not willing to go there, but the feeling of a negative attitude towards Germans there. So again, this discourse has an influence on our behavior. People are reading in newspapers that there is an anti-German atmosphere, so they do not go there. Actually, I would be interested in what comes out if you google “atmosphere crisis” in Greek and to compare what is written there. Greek newspapers write about German politics in a negative way, but what is the atmosphere among ordinary Greeks?

Olimpia Dragouni:

Ines, there are articles about relations and the atmosphere but I think I will find some links and send them to the forum. What I wanted to say is that the Greek crisis is a fascinating subject. It could be a 'beautiful catastrophe' if it was beautiful because there is nothing beautiful in people dying because they don't have money to get cured, etc. which is the case here. This particular crisis is connecting so many aspects and so many disciplines, the humanities, social sciences and economy in one place and we could just discuss it and analyze it for hours.

What Jacek said at some point about the crisis of state in Greece – this is also the point I wanted to make. There are two aspects: Greek state versus Greek people. If we talk about the Greek state I could even risk a conclusion that it was from the very beginning in the state of crisis. This is the state which was cheating its own citizens by providing medicines for malaria where instead of

medicine you had flowers. And here we have a problem of trust and mistrust. The situation that was mentioned by Kamil and by Paweł is a symptom of mistrust of people towards the state. So are we talking about the crisis of the state or the crisis of some people?

What I also wanted to mention is that I do not agree with Przemek Kordos about his comparison between Cyprus and Greece. In the case of Cyprus we have a different situation because Greece at some point was too big to simply fall down. The Cypriot assets were... Well, if you were even reading the headlines you could see there was a big Russian interest in there. So the interest in Cyprus was there for very rational reasons. Here again we have economy versus science. Is economy somehow, anyhow scientific or is it more a social or political science based. As for what Krzysztof said, he compared the situation of Greece to natural selection, I think that in the case of Greek people, the question is: is the selection natural? Who has the right to decide which group of people should be punished or not? Punished first or second? This is how it works.

Kamil Wielecki:

Thank you, Olimpia. I read some ethnographic accounts on Greece and basically the message was that average Greek people have two objects mainly to blame: one is Troika and the USA, Germany or France and the second one are their own politicians. So there is this feeling of loneliness and being betrayed.

Przemysław Kordos:

Olimpia, you were right, the situation in Greece and Cyprus is different but I wanted to compare attitudes. It's too early. Greece is in crisis for years and Cyprus hit the bottom maybe few months ago so we will see what will happen. I just wanted to share some hot remarks from the last week and these impressions were shocking. But of course it is too early to have conclusions for sure. For us, the Hellenic studies, this is a perfect moment for the debate because we are baking up our own crisis project for months now. We want to apply for a big grant from the Polish state, the funding of National Center for Science and the topic will be "the Greek nation in crises". We want to show that the crisis is somehow immanent to the Greek nature and the modern Greek history and culture and that crises were frequent and most of them were soft. Greece in a way was in the crisis so it changed for the better in any aspect you can touch. So we are humanists and we make our contribution to the topic of crisis but first of all, we should start from defining crisis because what we do here for almost two hours now is talking about the crisis while for all of us it is some common sense term and I wonder if we understand crisis in the same way. When you look into dictionaries and etymologies (which is always a bad idea according to me), you find so many definitions of crisis that basically this word is scientifically useless. Let me quote some of the definitions I found: "turning point", "decisive moment in conflict", "period of dispiritedness and motivation deficiency" and my favorite one: "crisis is a time for making decisions". With so many definitions what are we talking about? We had to solve it somehow and find some methodology and we found solutions outside of the humanist studies. We found solutions in two different disciplines: solving war conflicts in the world that have a special, very complex model of what crisis is: who is the actor, who is to blame, who is not to blame and so on. The second part of definition and methodology is connected to insurance. They simply have to define what crisis is because this is what they pay for. There you find a whole mine of ideas that are in a way alien to humanist world. Just to give you a taste of how they do it and to show you the definition because it is worthwhile: "Crisis is a series of events rather than one event that may cause a disaster (but it doesn't mean that it will cause a disaster). They are characterized by a diffused origin so the crisis comes from many ways not one which makes it difficult to have a complete view. One of the most important things according to me is that in the situation of crisis you don't have all the data to make a rational decision. One part of the problem is that we expect to find a rational solution and this is what people

look for in the world of politics. They want politicians to find good solutions. The crisis has come, there are issues and problems, let's sum them up, make a model and surely out of this equation a rational, efficient and correct solution will come up. Maybe the problem is that it is not the case. Maybe we will make some decisions but they will be judged in the future whether they were right or not.

To sum up, I think that few people look at the crisis from the positive point of view: for us the crisis is just an effect and nothing else but nobody believes that crisis is also an opportunity; this is the moment when something will have to change. It is obvious. Some people change and optimists say: changes are always for better. For me personally, this crisis has two good sides so to speak – one of them is that people finally are talking about my object of interest. Greece was in the shadows, people were going there for vacations and were saying: “I went to some island, I saw some ruins or I went to the beach”. Actually when I was in Cyprus I asked one Polish tourist: “What are you going to see today?”. “Oh, we are having a circular excursion today, she said. I don't know what we are going to see”. Greece was an obscure, distant and warm country with probably some interesting people living there. Now people are starting to talk about it, to write about it. Today it is a first day the book written by a journalist Dionisos Stouris entitled “Bitter oranges” is out. It is going to be the first book about Greece in years. The other thing is that it is also good for the nation itself, the Greek nation, because they will have to define themselves. Crisis is a kind of a mirror – they look at themselves and they see – this was good, this was bad. Look at the politics. One of the most important and fundamentally present forces in nowadays Greece is Golden Dawn where almost 50% of members are fascists. They are in parliament and have a public voice. Few years ago it was completely impossible and now this is reality so it says something about people's fears, about people's attitudes. Something that was hidden and was just a cloud of some eccentric (not even) politicians has now become a political force.

Angela Brintlinger

I'm a foreign professor here at the University of Warsaw and I'm an American but I don't know nothing about America so I'm safe there. I'm both a Russianist and a literary scholar. I wanted to say that first of all as humanists we do have an important contribution to make, several important contributions to make and we need to think about how we are shaping our own discipline as we look at these countries and these crises that are coming to our view. We've heard about Zorba the Greek, we've heard about the importance of tourism in Greece, we know that culture impacts the economy and the economy impacts culture and all these are very important questions. Also when we think about something like Zorba the Greek, we think about the name and the film, but we were reminded that actually literature is important. The media, advertising, Hollywood, are the things that are easy. Those are the images that are in our minds and we can see it quickly and we know about it even if we didn't see the Cacoyannis's movie, we know what it means. But we don't know what is in the book because we don't have time to read it. It is long, it has a lot of pages, you need to pay attention. We can think about the ways in which we as humanists can try to re-focus attention on things that actually have more depth and more meaning than the flat surface that we are looking at in our daily life that is so saturated by media.

Second thing I want to say is about data. We as humanists are now lured by data, we think that data is exciting, we want to be part of that maths world. We've realized that actually we should have been real scientists cause we could have used all those formulas and have real results. I think we need to look at that data and we also have to resist it a little bit and get to interpret it using the skills that we have rather than simply mathematical skills.

Leaving Greece and coming back to Russia, I think Kamil dodged what somebody asked him earlier and that we are all dying to know: about the relation between Russian economy and the Russian identity that is a part of his research because the difference really between Greece and

Russia is that Greece is small. It has a small economy. It is a part of the Eurozone but it is a small place. So when I think about the shadow economy in Russia, I'm horrified. People get 20% of their income on the books. And the rest of it, the same employers are paying them in cash. There is an enormous part of the economy that doesn't register, that is not being taxed. Why isn't that have a huge effect? Because the government has other ways to deal with it and Greece is a small economy and her government doesn't have the same solutions. I think we can look at these comparisons and see some interesting ideas for thinking about Greece. But the most important thing is that perhaps we should all buy a ticket and go to Greece. Our tourist dollars can help out as we think further about the books that we wished we had time to read.

Bogdan Trifunović:

First, a short comment and a question for the presenters. Listening to your presentations and following the discussion, I think that there is a certain misunderstanding between you – the presenters – and the part of our audience. We heard a lot about images and my question is: was your intention to organize this seminar as a discussion about the Greek crisis and the images connected to it based on certain discourses or stereotypes and to repeat the question of the guest professor from the US: “What humanities have to offer new for this topic?”.

Wlasios Montemarkos:

First, a financial point: although I'm not an expert, I will say that it is very good for you Americans that you have Fed [Federal Reserve System] that is taking care of your economy. We have European Central Bank and we feel unsafe.

Second, there is the "Holy Trinity" in the modern financial world that is evaluating others: Standard & Poor's, Moody's and Fitch. They have authority over life and death of countries and citizens.

Third, European Union. We Greeks feel that there is a lack of solidarity in this crisis. I don't want to say that it is a “foreign finger” but whoever has a sense to think he will find it very reasonable. We want to be a part of the Union that is solidarity. I will tell an anecdote to illustrate this phenomenon. Let's say we have a patient in bed dying and many doctors are making a council: which remedy and therapy they will apply. For the last ten years they have been insisting on the same method without progress. They say that it is the organism of the patient that is wrong. It is not the remedy and not our “science”. That is how we perceive things. We are family because for three years now we are doing whatever they say. Unemployment is raising. My son doesn't have a job and my father has a half of his pension but we must be calm. After all, we do not strike very much. Last one was a half year ago. Imagine what you would do if you lost 40% of your income. I'm not speaking about the rich, the rich do not have any problem. I'm speaking about normal people like me and you. The rich do not have any problem, in Greece I can assure you, I know them, this is a comfortable situation for them because they go to the resorts and they don't care about this whole mass of over their heads. They feel lonely and they enjoy it.

My last point: perspectives and answers. Unemployment is now at 27%. They tell us it will be reduced after two and three years if we behave like good children. GDP was reduced by 24-27% and it is even worse than our GDP loss in war time. Salaries of usual people dropped by 35%, of course speculators did not lose so much. Phenomenon of double taxes, it is actually the half of the life level we had by year 2009. Maybe I was living above my capacities: I had a salary and I had my own house, I could change my car after 10 years and I could go for 10 days on vacations, maybe I was living like a tycoon. I accept I was wrong now I want to be punished. But I don't think I was asking too much from life. Try to think that we are very calm, very normal, most of the time we are angry with our politicians because we think that is a wrong representation of our will.

Kamil Wielecki:

I would like to add only few sentences to sum up our debate. We had a variety of voices and I think it was the biggest gain we took from it - the voices from many perspectives were very enriching. What we were doing here for the last two hours was understanding what we see and what we live in. The first step towards solving the crisis is understanding what it is or as Przemysław said - defining it. There was also a strong thread about the power of images and the power of economic discourse in creating these images; these 'mediascapes', as Appadurai calls them, shape our minds. Our general question expressed by professor Conn and repeated by Bogdan was - what can humanists and social scientists do about it? How can they tackle the crisis? My personal answer to these questions is that we have the role of mediation, mediation between different groups, politicians, economists, groups affected by the crisis and so on. This mediation, in my opinion, should lead to a new social agreement, to formation of a new kind of welfare state.