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Ad 1. For an early modern historian, the most inspiring feature of the many changes that have taken place since 1990, at least with regard to the history of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, has been the development of relations with historians in the Commonwealth's successor states: Lithuania, Ukraine, and Belarus in particular, but also Germany and Latvia. Much had been achieved in the years before 1990, but the restrictions of the Communist period and the discouragement of the Soviet authorities had seriously limited the extent to which historians could collaborate and work together. Polish historians, led in particular by several highly distinguished historians of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, including Andrzej Rachuba, the late — and much lamented — Henryk Lulewicz, Henryk Wisner, and Grzegorz Błaszczyk, and of Royal and Ducal Prussia, including Janusz Małek, Jerzy Dygdała, Andrzej Kamieński, and Edmund Kizik among many others, have rejected the Polonocentric and nationalist approaches that have plagued the history of the Commonwealth since the nineteenth century. Genuine collaborations across modern borders, and the opening up of archives to all, have helped to create a dynamic and complex scholarship that is at last enabling the history of Poland-Lithuania to take its rightful place in general histories of early modern Europe.

Ad 2. I would be cautious about recommending any one approach. History is a broad discipline, and Poles, after the experience of the Communist period, should be properly suspicious of claims that historical phenomenon can only be interpreted within one rigid framework. Since 1990, a younger generation of Polish historians has had the opportunity to broaden and deepen Polish historiography through exposure to the wide range of scholarship outside Poland, access to which was difficult between 1945 and 1990, not least on account of access to western historiography. This has been immensely fruitful, and after 30 years, Polish historians are well placed to make substantial contributions to wider debates.

Ad 3. There is always a place for synthesis; indeed that place is important. Professional history can all too easily fragment into ever-more specialist silos, which develop their own jargon and assumptions, as historians write for an increasingly narrow audience of specialists. While theory has its uses, it can be dangerous. Much writing in the Humanities and Social Sciences has become all but unreadable to anyone but specialists. Polish historians have a distinguished tradition of writing syntheses for broader audiences. Syntheses are, however, notoriously difficult to write, and can be notoriously difficult to read if they are too dutiful. A good synthesis needs an angle, and should, perhaps, be controversial. With regard to Poland, it is important that syntheses should not be too narrow in focus. The great problem in writing the history of Poland is that the nature of Poland and the meaning of Polishness has changed dramatically across the centuries. Polish authors writing synthetic accounts of the history of Poland need to think about how Poland's history looks from the outside. Nurturing and sustaining national complexes may help sales figures within Poland, but will not impress beyond its borders. The instrumentalisation of history for political purposes is another danger. All syntheses are by their very nature selective, but some selections are better than others.

Ad 4. The principal social duty — rather than function — of a historian is to explain. The current fashion of judging the past by condemning it according to the moral standards of the present is worrying. Politicians and pressure groups provide selective accounts of the past that are not concerned with explanation, but with the justification of current political positions. It is the role of the historian to consider all sides of the story and present the complexity of the past, rather than the convenient simplifications of the politically committed. That can and should involve challenging popular misconceptions and myths, despite the risk that such attempts may not be popular. Historians must ask difficult questions; they should not be content with easy answers. They need to confront the difficult questions as well as the issues ignored or deliberately overlooked by authoritarian regimes, but as historians, not as moral philosophers.