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Józef Tischner’s Ethics of Values in Relation to Freedom

By looking at the development of human thought, one can identify the various areas of interest which, over time, through their development, are transformed into complex scientific disciplines. Nevertheless, it is a common belief that it is the mathematical-natural disciplines which are indicators of progress. From time to time, however, like the proverbial boomerang, the voices of philosophers, theologians, and sociologists who, reaching for anthropological issues, try to stimulate reflection on the human condition. The same was done by Prof. Józef Tischner – a well-known in Poland philosopher of the 20th century from Krakow¹. His creative work was permeated by reflection on the person, and his philosophy of dialogue is a reflection on the phenomenon of encountering the other.

The purpose of this article is to attempt to present a concept of understanding moral decisions based on the system of values and the role of freedom in the management of axioms. The point of reference and the subject of the analysis will be the ethical values contained in the most representative sources developed by the above-referenced author. They will be subject to critical analysis, furthermore critical synthesis.

1. The world of values and the world of norms

Tischner wanted to develop his reflections in such a way that they would have a strictly existential reference to life, because that is what they mean for

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¹ Józef Tischner (1931-2000) – polish philosopher, ethicist and Catholic priest. His work made a great contribution to the development of the philosophy of the drama (which he called the philosophy of the encounter), philosophical anthropology, axiology and social ethics. He relied mainly on phenomenology, the philosophy of the dialogue and existentialism. He was a lecturer at the Pontifical Faculty of Theology in Cracow (P. Dutkiewicz, *Tischner Józef*, in: *Filozofowie współcześni. Leksykon*, ed. J. Szmyd, Kraków 2003, p. 488).

the human person. While in the past philosophy was born out of thinking about the surrounding world, now the starting point is the concept of pain, which he wants to express and for which he wants to find a cure. So it is to include the care for the human in the state of their despair and hope². Humanity experienced this pain especially intensely in the twentieth century. This is probably why Tischner's voice found a wide audience – as history shows, questions about fundamental matters such as the human person, meaning, and values, return in the context of the collapse of particular visions, at the same time exposing destructive ideologies. It is then that humanity returns to the roots of its thought. It rediscovers the role of the encounter with the person as a fundamental existential experience. Unlike in classical ontology, here it is not the thing, but the person who opens up to dialogue, revealing the drama of good and evil³. In suffering, the truth about the person is revealed. The *Philosophy of the drama*⁴, as defined by Tischner, does not come from the „pages of the book”, but from the encounter with another, „concerned about his fate”⁵. Already at the beginning of the analysis of the encounter, the thinker from Krakow puts his reader before the phenomenon of freedom. Therefore, in looking for its sources, one should analyze the axiological experiences in the person since it is in them that the drama occurring during the encounter takes place. And this drama is about choice: in confronting the other, one can show evil or good. Tischner is not, therefore, an enthusiast of the ethics of norms, because this turns out to be insufficient. The original experience of good and evil takes place in the encounter with the other, which becomes a source of ethical self-knowledge through the ethical values that it contains such as truth, justice and fidelity, which are the basis for the objectivity of ethical commitments⁶. The ethics of values read in this way lead to moral phenomena, while the ethics of norms try to clarify and validate them. Both are therefore complementary⁷. For example, when a person in danger is supposed to help someone, they do not look for a certain norm of behavior in their memory, but for a solution which has a moral reference to it, attracting them to an act. „The ‘do not kill’ norm is appropriate, but it is futile if I don't see that the other is injured. It is all the more ineffective if I don't see that death is evil and life is good”⁸. In an encounter with the person, one experiences precisely these types of objective values –

² M. Drwięga, J. A. Kłoczowski, K. Tarnowski, *Filozofia z wnętrza metafory. Z Markiem Drwięgą, Janem Andrzejem Kłoczowskim OP i Karolem Tarnowskim, filozofami, rozmawia Jarosław Makowski*, „Kontrapunkt” 48(2000), nr 10, <http://www.tygodnik.com.pl/kontrapunkt/48/index.html> (access: 12.01.2020).

³ J. Tischner, *Myślenie według wartości*, Kraków 1993, p. 489-490.

⁴ S. Górzna, *Józef Tischner philosophy of drama*, “European Journal of Science and Theology” 11(2015), no. 1, p. 187-190.

⁵ Ibidem, p. 306.

⁶ Ibidem, p. 385.

⁷ J. Wojtysiak, *Filozofia i życie*, Kraków 2007, p. 164.

⁸ J. Tischner, *Myślenie według wartości*, Kraków 1993, p. 389.

ones which should be followed – and anti-values which open up to the world of objective evil. Therefore, initially the drama takes place in the world of values, which can then be *codified* into specific norms. Technological ethics start with norms and only then passes to the human person. Meanwhile, a norm without the other is an empty, worthless set of rules. Perhaps that is why it stops being listened to today: because orders and prohibitions cause defensive reactions in people. The ethic of values uses a language that reveals and opens one's eyes to see the other⁹. The good that Fr. Maximilian Kolbe's sacrificial act liberated was neither a prohibition nor an injunction, but a concrete person. The principle of love for one's neighbor, after all, could have led him to remain in line and provide pastoral assistance to other prisoners. The ethics of norms, therefore, give way to the ethics of values¹⁰.

2. A Person in a world of values

Following Max Scheler, Józef Tischner, shares the view that values exist objectively, in such a way that they demand realization (concretization). Even if we treat them as ideas, they are always *linked* to reality. Such axiology has its important consequences, as it indicates the objectivity and universal validity of values and norms derived from them. Therefore, it is reasonable to make decisions aimed at the realization of values based on the recognized order of values. If they were relative or subjective, it would mean that the ethics based on them are the same. Tischner strongly opposes such positions¹¹.

Tischner took the criteria of value affiliation from Max Scheler, leaning towards a division according to the differences between value qualities. Thus, the lowest are the pleasure values while the higher include vitality (serving health and life), the spiritual (truth, good – moral values, beauty – aesthetic values, freedom) and the values of the sacred (Sacrum)¹². The gradations of lower values are easy to see. It is well known that healing does not have to be pleasurable, and yet it is a necessary action. Among spiritual values, it is the

⁹ Ibidem, p. 389-390.

¹⁰ J. Tischner, *Nieszczęsny dar wolności*, Kraków 1993, p. 69.

¹¹ A. Jędrzejewski, *Nikt nie jest dobry w samotności*, Radom 2006, p. 123-124.

¹² M. Scheler, *Der Formalismus in der Ethik und die materiale Werthethik. Neuer Versuch der Grundlegung eines etischen Personalismus*, Bern-Munich 1966, p. 116-118.

The mistake of hedonism is not to consider pleasure and comfort as a positive value, but to deny it as a negative value, but to absolve it. Thus other values are not perceived. What is more, hedonism introduces a kind of anarchy into life, which is particularly noticeable in social life. Generating egoism inevitably leads to conflicts within communities and within oneself.

Vitalism, that is, the cult of life values seems to forget about the higher dimension of human life. The fact that life is a biological fact does not mean that it is limited to it. Questions about sense and purpose, for example, direct to another, deeper dimension of existence, discovering human spirituality (J. Tischner, *Etyka wartości i nadziei*, in: *Wobec wartości*, D. Hildebrand, J. Kłoczkowski, J. Paściak, J. Tischner, Poznań 1982, p. 68-71).

moral values, referring to truth and good, that occupy a special place. There is a limit above which there are values that demand absolute defense, and, therefore, no evil aims may be sacrificed for the dignity of the person, their freedom, justice, the highest truths and sources of the highest hope and love¹³. They demand to be defended because they express and develop the good will in the human person, and therefore they cannot be treated merely as means to an end. There is a sense of fidelity to higher values in a person, so they are ready to sacrifice themselves for noble ends, and even offer their life to save another person, their homeland, freedom, and justice.

As has already been mentioned, values, especially higher ones, demand realization, not only because of the strength they possess, but because the human person has a certain sensitivity to them. It is also their realization that is the condition of growth in humanity. A life that does not grow towards justice, freedom, truth and hope would be devoid of any deeper meaning¹⁴. It is therefore always morally right to choose a higher value, even if it involves a painful abandonment of the lower ones. It should be pointed out that the right value must first be recognized and then accepted. It requires, therefore, revealing the truth and calling upon good will. Otherwise, one has to deal with *ethical sensitivity*. A departure from the existing order of values results in either *moral blindness* (insensitivity to values) or moral subjectivity. The latter is expressed by *one-sidedness*, i.e. the pursuit of only lower values (pleasure, vitality), or a situation where higher values completely overshadow lower ones. On the other hand, when higher values are realized only to achieve lower values, or the price for them is an evil of a higher order, there is *moral perversity*¹⁵. The goal cannot sanctify evil means. An example of this is Hitlerism, with its idea of a *new order* in Europe. The fact that it is possible to achieve great and good goals by using only noble means is attested to by the work of M. Gandhi¹⁶. In the face of the inevitable alternative, it is justified to choose the lesser evil to prevent a greater one¹⁷.

In order to be morally good, the act must consist in choosing a value that stands higher in the hierarchy presented. However, this is not the only condition. Good will is also necessary as the source and purpose of every choice. It determines the moral personality of a person, in which they find different ways of being toward the values. In traditional ethics these ways are called virtues¹⁸. „The virtue of justice is a typical ‘way of being’ of one person towards another person (or many people) who is threatened by injustice (...) The virtue of fide-

¹³ J. Tischner, *Myślenie według wartości*, Kraków 1993, p. 410-411.

¹⁴ Ibidem, p. 412.

¹⁵ J. Tischner, *Etyka wartości i nadziei*, in: *Wobec wartości*, D. Hildebrand, J. Kłoczkowski, J. Paściak, J. Tischner, Poznań 1982, p. 61-62.

¹⁶ Ibidem, p. 80.

¹⁷ Ibidem, p. 137-138.

¹⁸ A. Derdziuk, *Cnota*, in: *Jan Paweł II. Encyklopedia Nauczania Moralnego*, ed. J. Nagórny, K. Jerzyna, Radom 2005, p. 117-121.

ty is a 'way of being' in which one does not give up human values once they have been recognized as their own"¹⁹. The human person builds themselves by means of good will, but when they encounter external difficulties, or is somehow blinded, internal weaknesses in the realization of this good reveal themselves. This is a way of being, where evil creeps into action or desire. A vice is, in consequence, self-doubt.

3. An inter-personal area of freedom

In order to find faith in oneself to do good, one has to understand who the human person is. For Tischner, the answer to this question lies in the experience of the *Self* as a value. At the same time, the person is an entity „per se” – „by himself”, because he assimilates values and thus transforms himself and the world. A person is a task for themselves, filled in the world of personal values. The axiological dimension of a person is solidarity with other values. When a person recognizes themselves as a special value, they realize that they are drawn towards values, that is, they are capable of solidarity with them. This process is achieved through egotistical experiences. So, by recognizing oneself as something valuable, one can be bound to what is „mine”. „I am what is valuable to me. The ontological area of my *Self* is determined by the area of values with which I was able to enter into a relationship of absolute solidarity”²⁰. This sense of solidarity is shattered when a value is no longer considered as such for a person or is read as negative.

According to the author of *The Philosophy of the Drama*, even though the *Self* is realized as a value in a certain way, for example as: I father, I doctor, I priest, it is only the concept of the axiological self that reveals the basic approach of the human. Tischner departs from the classic concept of a person as a substance (Boetius) or an existential project (J.-P. Sartre)²¹. The axiological self „is towards values”²². The person is not an object with a definitively defined nature. Neither is he a pure freedom, or an infinite creator of his own projects of existence. He realizes himself in freedom, not reproduces. This does not mean, however, that this freedom can be understood as voluntary. It is in the world of values that the noble and the vile, the heroes and the cowards are born²³. As mentioned earlier, *I (my-self)* demand the realization of values. In this way he reveals the *axiological hunger* that seeks to fill the *axiological*

¹⁹ Ibidem, p. 91.

²⁰ J. Tischner, *Świat ludzkiej nadziei*, Kraków 1992, p. 167.

²¹ D. Zuber, *Koncepcja Ja Aksjologicznego w filozofii dramatu ks. Józefa Tischnera*, „Methodos. Przegląd teologiczno-społeczny Wyższego Seminarium Teologicznego im. Jana Łaskiego w Warszawie. Rok V-VII” 9(2008), p. 22-23; J.-P. Sartre, *Byt i nicość. Zarys ontologii fenomenologicznej*, trans. J. Kielbasa, P. Mróz, R. Abramciów, R. Rzyziński, P. Małochleb, Kraków 2007, p. 699.

²² J. Tischner, *Świat ludzkiej nadziei*, Kraków 1992, p. 180.

²³ T. Gadacz, *Historia filozofii XX wieku*, vol. 2, Kraków 2009, p. 634-635.

gaps. It is often said that justice must be done. However, the perspective expands in the face of the axiological self. The person has no limits in their development, but they can only choose from the possible values of the moment, here and now. The hunger for discovering and assimilating further values remains. By gaining the title of a doctor, they open up a new horizon of axiological activities, which remains closed to others²⁴. The concept of axiological hunger is supposed to explain the adventure and limitation of the human person, but it also emphasizes the desire for continuous development.

Tischner connects his ethics of values with the *philosophy of the encounter*, developed, among others, by Emmanuel Levinas²⁵. The encounter is the basis for learning about the world. The cognition owes objectivity to a person, because „objectivity consists in the fact that a road, a tree exists not only for me, but also for another”²⁶. The second in this context is not only a builder of intersubjective understanding, enabling cognition through comparison of conclusions, but also the *beginning of thinking*, because it poses a question to the encountered²⁷. Thanks to the encounter, the person expresses themselves and gains the necessary confirmation of his own existence and freedom. It is therefore easy to understand why Tischner defines the interpersonal space with freedom, in which the realization of humanity takes place. This freedom is nothing more than a way for the existence of good, so no one can be good in solitude and thus free in solitude²⁸. What’s more, the other one is also in relation to others, that is to say, it connects with other people and entire communities²⁹.

In such unveiled new axiological horizons the Other is discovered because: „It is always the case that either I propose to the other a value to be realized and I hope that the other one will take up my proposal, or the other one proposes something similar to me, with a similar hope for me”³⁰. It turns out, however, that the primary experience is not the experience of value in itself, but the presence of the other person. The dramatic event of the encounter between „I (Self)” and „You (Other)” allows us to know the hierarchy of values which, together with the freedom to strive for authenticity, becomes the criterion for discovering the human ethos³¹. This ethos defines the truth about the human being, about his essence. The axiological self reveals the relativity of the subject of the encounter and opens it to „You” because it is realized by entering

²⁴ K. Tarnowski, *Książeczka o sprawach ludzkich*, „Znak” 28(1976), no. 8-9, p. 1288-1289.

²⁵ E. Levinas, *Totalité et infini. Essai sur l'extériorité*, Den Haag 1971.

²⁶ A. Karoń-Oroński, J. Tischner, *Spotkanie. Z księdzem Józefem Tischnerem rozmawia Anna Karoń-Ostrowska*, Kraków 2003, p. 129.

²⁷ Ibidem, p. 130.

²⁸ A. Jędrzejewski, *Personalistyczna interpretacja rzeczywistości społecznej w polskiej fenomenologii*, Lublin 1997, p. 270.

²⁹ T. Gadacz, *Odpowiedzialność i sprawiedliwość*, in: *Zawierzyć człowiekowi. Księdzu Józefowi Tischnerowi na sześćdziesiąte urodziny*, Z. Brzeziński et al., Kraków 1991, p. 124.

³⁰ J. Tischner, *Myślenie według wartości*, Kraków 1993, p. 482.

³¹ T. Gadacz, *Historia filozofii XX wieku*, vol. 2, Kraków 2009, p. 636.

into concrete relationships with others (e.g., I doctor, father, son). In the space of values the person is realized or destroyed. However, it is not the very existence of negative values that threatens man, but only their acceptance and realization³².

Freedom in the encounter does not come from nowhere. First, it is inherited and then developed through liberation. A clear perception of freedom occurs when a person experiences that he or she „does not have to” but „may”. This means, however, a transition to a world of axiology, where values and anti-values, good and evil, exist between people. This space, by its very nature, is dramatic and characterized by prepositions: „over”, „under”, and „by”. It hides the truth that my freedom is crystallized in the freedom of another. It is freedom „towards you”, „for you”, „next to you”, and even „against you” - but then it remains unrecognized³³. The other can be ashamed to say “no” and make it clear that such ‘freedom’ is not the essence of freedom. Freedom without the other is irresponsible. „The proper restriction of one's freedom is not, as is sometimes claimed, the freedom of another person, but his slavery. For it makes a man unable to be himself, but must be what violence has made him”³⁴. An inherited form of freedom demands improvement. Any such process must involve the autonomous right of the encountered person to „be”, which does not mean indifference, but instead creates opportunities for concrete acts of kindness and thus to rid oneself of selfishness, egocentrism, pride, lust³⁵. As so – from an endurance of presence, through help, to the generous sacrifice. It is, therefore, a recognition of the other person's right to *possess himself*, which means renouncing the other person's possession. Freedom is a gift. The universal gift of the Absolute – God to the human person and the gift transmitted from person to person. This is how a person becomes a person, and freedom becomes freedom³⁶. The basic “axiological law” underlines that the level of freedom increases with the importance of values. In the face of what is absolute, nothing is needed anymore, and everything is possible. In the face of hunger, person has no choice. But in the face of truth and untruth, justice and injustice, he is free. That is why man experiences the greatest freedom in the face of God³⁷.

The human being who participates in the Absolute Good discovers that his freedom is the source of his dignity. For his individual good, if it is authentic, cannot be denied by the good of another. Such a good recognizes its own and

³² J. Tischner, *Filozofia dramatu*, Kraków 1998, p. 83-90.

³³ J. Tischner, *Spór o istnienie człowiek*, Kraków 1998, p. 229-230.

³⁴ J. Tischner, *Polski młyn*, Kraków 1991, p. 255.

³⁵ J. Tischner, *Przestrzeń jako projekt wolności*, in: *Europa. Fundament jedności*, ed. A. Dylus, Warszawa 1999, p. 8-10.

³⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 332-334.

³⁷ J. Tischner, *Nieszczęsny dar wolności*, Kraków 1993, p. 217.

someone else's freedom to exist³⁸. Freedom is therefore necessary and sufficient for existence itself; its purpose is not to give space to the other.

Freedom that is present in an encounter dynamizes existence. A positive choice makes one more human, while a negative choice degrades that humanity. Freedom is shaped under the influence of selected values³⁹. The human person is defined in the space of freedom, which for Tischner is not absolute. In an encounter one can choose from certain possibilities that can be realized or rejected. The realization of values, therefore, consists in accepting the perspective of realization, contained in the value of *possibility*. A person wishing to be a good doctor realizes the possibilities presented by the values of a doctor with vocation. In this way certain attitudes and acts of human behavior flow from the axiological self⁴⁰.

Conclusion

When one is perceived with the eyes of the author of *Thinking by Value*, one can clearly attribute Tischner's thought to the trend of personalism, because it proves the primacy of the personal concept of reality. A person is not a part of the collective, nor an individualistic entity. Their undeniable autonomy is open to others. The sources of freedom should, therefore, be seen in the phenomenon of the encounter. It becomes the value and space of becoming and relating to oneself and the other. Ethics, according to Tischner, is "the theory of experiencing the other person"⁴¹. In the encounter with another a new way of existence is born: the ethical way. The interpersonal drama touches the interior of the human being, so the sources of the person and freedom should be sought in the axiological experience in which the drama takes place. According to Professors from Cracow, a moral norm is not enough to understand the inner motives of action. It proves that in the space of the encounter, a person in fact, experiences the values that call for realization. It is the wrong attitude to them, that degrades person. The meeting with another allows one to experience the space of freedom, which is a necessary component for development by satisfying the *axiological hunger* inherent in the "I (*Self*)". The higher the value, the greater the freedom.

This is how the potential of his possibilities is revealed, that allows us to see more clearly the dignity and vocation of the person. The presented analysis seems to be accurate and useful in further analyses concerning, amongst others, the phenomenon of freedom and the system of values.

³⁸ J. Tischner, *Spór o istnienie człowieka*, Kraków 1998, p. 316-318.

³⁹ A. Bobko, *Poszukiwanie prawdy o człowieku*, „Znak” 550(2001), no. 3, p. 57-58.

⁴⁰ D. Zuber, *Koncepcja Ja Aksjologicznego w filozofii dramatu ks. Józefa Tischnera*, „Methodos. Przegląd teologiczno-społeczny Wyższego Seminarium Teologicznego im. Jana Łaskiego w Warszawie. Rok V-VII” 9(2008), p. 25-26.

⁴¹ J. Tischner, *Etyka wartości i nadziei*, in: *Wobec wartości*, D. Hildebrand, J. Kłoczkowski, J. Paściak, J. Tischner, Poznań 1982, p. 56.

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Summary

The aim of this article is to provide an introduction into the ethics of values developed by Józef Tischner. In his analyses, the philosopher from Cracow departs from the ethics of norms and presents the reality of choices as a way of realizing values. In the encounter with the Other, a drama takes place – one that reveals the truth about the human condition. An indispensable element of this drama is freedom, which, although it may be the cause of mistakes, is, above all, a way of the existence of good and a condition of personal growth.

Keywords: values, norms, freedom, encounter.

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