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### CLASSIC PHILOSOPHY AND SOME NEGATIVE CHARACTERISTICS OF CONTEMPORARY CULTURE

1. The word „culture”. 2. Crisis of contemporary culture and philosophy. 3. Return to the classic philosophy?

Issues concerning the relationship between philosophy and culture are of actual significance. The point is that, although philosophy is a component of culture, nevertheless, in view of its specific character, it is shaping it. Philosophy contributes to an outlook of culture, but the culture exerts an influence on the philosophy.

Today, the failures of contemporary culture are not only heard, but also experienced every day. Sometimes, to express the state of present day culture, it is said: „the present culture is ill”. The origin of these shortcomings is seen in philosophy and its way of diffusion. For even if philosophy is not the only factor of the „outlook” of culture, it is still one of its major causes.

These circumstances are enough, we think, to ask a reasonable question: In what way could classic philosophy be useful, to overcome the shortcomings of contemporary culture?

#### 1. THE WORD „CULTURE”

The word „culture” is not quite clear. It is beyond this scope to define diverse meanings of it. It would require an analysing review of numerous definitions found both in common language and in scientific literature. It is maintained that there are hundreds of definitions of culture. Their common feature seems to be that they refer to culture as related, more or less consistently to the „spiritual life of man”. In other words „spiritual life” is referred to a concrete individual or to a social group. The point is that as man him-

self or a social group constitute an organized entity, so the „spiritual life” reveals more or less pronounced logic consequence and organized form. It is a complex of forms and patterns with more or less integrated components.

Culture could be considered, among others, from its static or objective side. It appears then as the whole output of what is called „spiritual human life”, including man himself. It is a specific manifestation of that with which man as creator is endowed, that is of what system of values and purposes he uses when creating.

## 2. CRISIS OF CONTEMPORARY CULTURE AND PHILOSOPHY

When there is a point of crisis of contemporary culture, then the word „crisis” is understood to mean breakdowns in the process of its development. The breakdowns may be evidenced by some quite definite phenomena within individual and social life of man. Their classification is various.

One of such trends is secularization. It is a historic-cultural development under which there is a concentration of attention on temporary life, and on terrestrial reality. It implies a process of culture emancipating itself from moments of religion. In the field of knowledge, it manifests itself in the interpretation of the world and of everything belonging to it, including man himself by eliminating in advance, any reference to motives transcendental to the world and the man. Its main feature is the flight from fundamental questions. In the field of human activity, it appears as a trait justifying man’s motivations without any reference beyond the realm of temporary purposes<sup>1</sup>.

Another trend of contemporary culture is a dechristianization. It is a process of dehabitation from everything that is Christian. It manifests itself in disappearance of religious practices. It is linked

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<sup>1</sup> H. Blumenberg, *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age. Status of the Concept „Secularization”*, trans. R. M. Wallace, Cambridge 1983, 3-11.

„The concept of secularization has played a special descriptive role among the manifold interpretations of the relationship of the modern Western world to the mediaeval culture which had been shaped by Christianity. However, the term lacks clarity. (...) To call modern culture „secularized” can, on the one hand, mean that it is a world from which the holy has disappeared. On the other hand, however, it can also denote a world which continues to be linked to its Christian roots despite all its emancipation from Christianity”. W. Pannenberg, *Christianity in a Secularized World*, trans. J. Bowden, New York, 1989, VIII-IX.

closely with, a process of eliminating sacred elements from beliefs and individual attitudes, organizational structures and even from religious functions

The above trends reveal themselves in: practical moves of man, morality, religion, science, art and politics. They are fundamental in the sense that their manifestations in the above fields, are such attitudes as: orientation to liberalism, resulting in practical materialism, an attitude of relativism and there involved selfindulgence in religious and moral issues and the consumptionism giving priority, in both private and public way of life, to the pursuit of material gains.

If it is said, metaphorically, that the contemporary culture is ill then it should be also said that, in some sense, ill is the contemporary man. Quite to the point here is the maxim: „agere sequitur esse”. But it has to be, pointed out that „esse” in this case is not a primary phenomenon but equally, in a certain „level” a work of culture.

The crisis of contemporary culture and its fundamental human „esse” resulted, presumably, in a gradual departure from an absolute, permanent and hierarchic world of values and norms. The departure is not a development due to arbitrary human decisions but a fundamental development. Its most immediate ground seems to be philosophy. It is, namely, in its competence that such questions as fundamental as religion, morality, art, science, etc., are contained. So undoubtedly, Descartes is often pointed out or, strictly speaking, the 17<sup>th</sup> century, as a demarcation point and initial for the process of secularization and dechristianization of contemporary culture.

Out of philosophic trends, which influenced the patterns of present culture, there should be mentioned at least the following: methodological empiricism and their related movements, the rationalism with its proper apriorism and existentialism.

The methodological empiricism is responsible because its main characteristic has been the restriction of scientific cognition only and exclusively to knowledge obtained as a result of observation and cognition based on it, all this coupled with agnostic attitude. Such a standpoint, as it is well known, restrained the extent of valuable knowledge, eliminated completely the classic philosophy and all thinking similar to it, out of the extent of rational cognition. If a philosophy was accepted, it was no other than a philosophy of cognition.

Philosophic systems responsible for the condition of contemporary culture include also rationalism with its specific aprioristic attitude. Concerned is, first of all, this form of rationalism which tries to push the whole realm of problems raised by classic metaphysics, where, there is proper place for accepting values opposed by contemporary culture, out of theoretic order of thinking. The problems are rejected as non-recognizable or not corresponding to the reality and being only mental categories. In this way of thinking the source of rationality for the world and for the human thinking is human subject. Such is the fate of many religious and moral values and, in consequence, the passing over to subjectivist positions in the field of human behaviour.

An important role in evolving the outlook of contemporary culture was played by a current of philosophy called existentialism. It emerged, as it is well known, as a reaction against the Cartesian rationalism, panlogism of Hegel, positivism, scientism and naturalism. It referred to anthropocentrism by emphasizing the concrete, the finished and the paradoxal in the human being. It could be, found in different norms. Whatever these forms, their common characteristics are: departure from every objective kind of philosophy, as founded on the relationship subject-object, from philosophies constructed as systems, that is: scientist, semiocentrist and logical ones. Philosophy is understood in the existentialism as one of the basic existence ways.

If therefore, the condition of contemporary culture is causally linked with such solutions, emerged after, as a result of departure from the classic philosophy then, to remedy it, one should return to this philosophy.

### 3. RETURN TO THE CLASSIC PHILOSOPHY?

Prior to indicating reasons for returning to the classic philosophy, it has to be given, in few sentences, a description on how to understand the classic philosophy. This philosophy is understood here as an universal science or knowledge, objectivist and rational, searching for ultimate reasons for the reality-being experienced. The aim of this comprehended philosophy is to give response to the question: what makes it that something is being, without regard to what category it belongs, and that means a concern to comprehend necessary relations inside the being as occurring be-

tween factors constituting the being as being, or ultimately reducible to them.

This type of knowledge is a realistic one. The character of realism is secured for it, generally speaking, when taking into account, in the course of inquiry, actual condition of things and cognitive contact with the existing reality. It is also a rational knowledge. Its rationality is founded in respecting the main laws of the being and thinking, given as principles of: identity, non-contradiction, of excluded medium, of sufficient reason and of finality. Its universalism is due to its reaching over categorical limitations and relating to everything that exists.

Why should one return to such philosophy in order to make therapy of the contemporary culture? The point is that: this knowledge is deeply cognitive, ultimate, revealing an overtly outlook for contemplating its object. This knowledge does not only constitutes a way to wisdom but it's also called for by wisdom. It points out to Transcendence as the first cause of all being, as well as the supreme good making it the real ultimate goal of every human activity. Within this concept of philosophy, the axiology, system of values are justified ontically and not only gnoseologically or pragmatically<sup>2</sup>. It is possible as a result of reading the reality in its most deep structure.

The truth of this philosophy appears as a relation of conformity of knowledge and reality, but the philosophy shows, at the same time, that the reality is rational and rationality is not a supplement to the being but the being itself. It is a relation of conformity of reality with the intellect of the Absolute. The rationality of being is discovered by a subject in the things and is not a work of the subject. The truth is not relation of conformity of cognition with cognition or of cognition with the action. Justifications for the content of assertions are being sought ultimately not in a cognition, expressed in such or other system of signs or in such or otherwise comprehended action but in a state of things. Its proper realism effects it that there is no place in it for such or other type of subjectivism or relativism not to speak about pragmatism.

Departure from such comprehended truth is reflected in human activity and produces, ultimately, a falsification of human activity – as related not to the truth read out from the reality but, instead, as related to points having other sources than the reality. One of such

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<sup>2</sup> S. Kamiński, *Jak filozofować*, Lublin 1994, 168.

sources to the object of reference, upon which, for many centuries, the contemporary culture is based, is consensus, frequently called „truth generating consensus”. That consensus has become one of the tribunals authorized to it that, on behalf of short-lived situations or needs, determined by such or other occurrence, it decides on a direction to take by creative human activity<sup>3</sup>. The very consensus was ultimately authorized to decide e. g. which people are human beings and which are not and, thus depriving them of life means killing them or not.

Classic philosophy is not limited and closed in a temporal order, since with its proper nature, it goes beyond this world and reaches the Absolute as the personal cause of everything that exists. There is no place in it for what is called secularism. Within this philosophy, secularism, with all its consequences, has no justification<sup>4</sup>. Such concepts as: God, human soul, rationality of world are not „focus imaginarius” about which nothing could be said, they are not functions unifying the order of speculative reason or postulates of practical reason, as required by Kant, but the actual existing reality.

The concept of truth, within this kind of philosophy, is closely related to the concept of good as a goal of human activity. In classic philosophy, there is talk about the goodness of the being, an ontic good that is the good of things. This good of things is found ultimately – in what a thing is in its nature and in its manner of being. The good as the ultimate motive of human activity is, according to classic philosophy, the ground of existence for activity, and also a ground of its ordering that is the way of realisation. As a motive it decides why man has to act rather than not to act and, to act in this and not another way. In this concept of philosophy the good as a goal of action, on the side of subjective experience, takes form of rational realisation of man and, thus, a state of rational happiness.

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<sup>3</sup> T. Styczeń, *Kultura i prawda*, in: *Zadania filozofii we współczesnej kulturze*, Lublin 1992, 161.

<sup>4</sup> „Secularism is the doctrine that morality should be based solely on regard for the well-being of mankind in the present life to the exclusion of all considerations drawn from belief in God or in a future state. Secularism in this sense is rooted in the materialism of the ancient world of thought but unambiguously appears as a self-conscious idea only in the modern era. Only in the recent history has this viewpoint come to dominate Western society”. R. Bush, *What Is Secularism*, Southwestern Journal of Theology, Spring 1984, No. 2, 5-6.

When departing from real good as motive of action, substitute motives were introduced including such as: categorical imperative, obedience to law and rules, dignity of man<sup>5</sup>.

The process of abandoning the real good as the motive of every activity culminates in atheistic existentialism that should be called nihilism. In this system a thesis is adopted that „outside himself man finds nothing”. He finds no general truths nor values, even a priori, no rules to direct his behaviour<sup>6</sup>.

To recapitulate it could be said: if it is proposed to return to classic philosophy in order to remedy the contemporary culture and man, it is because this philosophy, due to its specific character, through the acceptance of real truth and real goodness as reasons for justifying both the order of cognition and the moral order, establishes that what is called culture and on the bases of realism, secures its bases against subjectivism, relativism and pragmatism.

Attention should be paid to the fact that man is an entity, as a person above all, desires to live in truth and in good and to discover, thanks to them, the sense of his existence. The classic philosophy allows him to do so.

Within this philosophy man learns an essential truth about himself, namely, that he is not exclusively a happening event because he has his nature, his essence and is a person which constitutes a certain ontic fundament for historic process and guarantees identity of human being.

## FILOZOFIA KLASYCZNA A NIEKTÓRE NEGATYWNE CECHY WSPÓŁCZESNEJ KULTURY

### Streszczenie

W artykule mówi się o kryzysie współczesnej kultury rozumianym jako znaczące załamanie w procesie jej rozwoju. Ważnymi cechami tego załamania jest proces sekularyzacji i dechrystianizacji. Trendy te przejawiają się w praktycznych decyzjach człowieka: w moralności, religii, teologii, nauce, sztuce i polityce. Owocują one konkretnymi postawami człowieka, takimi jak: postawa liberalizmu, uzewnętrzniająca się w praktycznym materializmie; postawa relatywizmu wyrażająca

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<sup>5</sup> M. A. Krąpiec, *Czy człowiek bez celu?, Człowiek w kulturze*, 6-7(1995), 16-23.

<sup>6</sup> W. Tatarkiewicz, *Historia filozofii*, t. III, Warszawa 1988, 351-352.

się w wybiórczości w dziedzinie religii i moralności oraz postawa konsumpcjonizmu fundująca priorytet pogoni za zyskiem materialnym.

Kryzys współczesnej kultury, a konsekwentnie współczesnego człowieka, nie jest zjawiskiem pierwotnym. Powstał on, jak można sądzić, z powolnego odwracania się od absolutnego, stałego i hierarchicznego świata wartości i norm. Szczególne znaczenie miało odejście od dobra i prawdy jako celu i zarazem jako racji bytu wszelkiej ludzkiej działalności.

Wśród nurtów filozoficznych, które przyczyniły się do tego odejścia wymienić należy: empiryzm metodologiczny i kierunki do niego nawiązujące, racjonalizm wraz z właściwym mu aprioryzmem i egzystencjalizm. W każdym z tych filozoficznych nurtów zauważa się z jednej strony zepchnięcie podstawowych zagadnień występujących w filozofii klasycznej, uniemożliwiających koncentrację uwagi człowieka jedynie na życiu doczesnym, otwierających człowieka na Transcendencję, z drugiej natomiast, zauważa się rozumienie religii również w kategoriach doczesności, interpretując ją jako swoisty rodzaj więzi społecznej.

Jeżeli kryzys współczesnej kultury przyczynowo łączy się m. in. z odejściem od filozofii klasycznej, to słusznym wydaje się być postulat powrotu do tej właśnie filozofii. Filozofia klasyczna jest wiedzą poznawczo dogłębną, ostateczną, odkrywającą ponadczasową perspektywę widzenia swego przedmiotu. Jest to wiedza nie tylko prowadząca do mądrości, lecz jest także wywołana przez mądrość. Wiedza ta związana jest z odpowiednią postawą aksjologiczną. Ukazuje Transcendencję jako pierwszą przyczynę wszelkiego bytu oraz jako najwyższe dobro, czyniąc z Niej realny, ostateczny cel wszelkiego ludzkiego działania. W tej koncepcji filozofii aksjologia, system wartości, uzasadnione są ontycznie, a nie tylko gnozeologicznie czy pragmatycznie. Jest to możliwe, bowiem jest rezultatem odczytania rzeczywistości w najgłębszej jej strukturze.

Prawda w tej filozofii występuje jako relacja zgodności poznania i rzeczywistości. Równocześnie filozofia ta ukazuje, że rzeczywistość jest racjonalna, a racjonalność nie jest dodana do bytu, lecz jest samym bytem, jest relacją zgodności rzeczywistości z intelektem Absolutu. Racjonalność bytu jest więc odkrywana przez podmiot w rzeczach, a nie jest tworem podmiotu.

Filozofia klasyczna poprzez akcentowanie realnej prawdy i realnego dobra, jako racji uzasadniających z jednej strony porządek poznawczy, z drugiej porządek moralny ustawia kulturę na bazie realizmu i zabezpiecza jej podstawy przed subiektywizmem, relatywizmem i pragmatyzmem.