

Philosophical Anthropology as the Main Thread of Tischner's Work

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This paper was first published as an introduction to *O człowieku: Wybór pism filozoficznych* [On Man: Selected Philosophical Papers] by Józef Tischner, Wrocław 2003, pp. xvii–xl.
Translated by Anna Fraś.

Thinking about man occupied a very specific position in the philosophy of Fr. Józef Tischner. His life and work testify that the human being was the main theme of his philosophy. For many years he was in charge of the Chair of Philosophy of Man at the Pontifical Academy of Theology in Kraków and the President of the Institute for Human Sciences in Vienna. Seminars and lectures on philosophical anthropology constituted the core of his didactic activity. The human being was incessantly present in his thinking and in his academic and journalistic writing. During his classes and in conversations Tischner often insisted that the fundamental question of philosophy is “who is man?”

If we were to look for the most general description of his philosophy, it is often said that he practiced the philosophy of drama. Still, it seems that the basic question of the philosophy of drama is “how is and how must man be constituted in

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12 order to take part in the drama?”¹ Tischner wrote much about ethics. Yet, what is ethics from his standpoint? “It is . . . a theory of man seen as the substance for values.”² Many similar examples can be shown. Fr. Tischner saw man as a free being whose drama plays itself out between good and evil. In one of his books, he wrote that the main concern for man in the world is to evade the evil that endangers us and to achieve the good that is to be achieved here and now. Freedom obliges us to take responsibility for ourselves and others, it enables us to meet another man authentically. Only within the sphere of inter-human relationships does the most important thing open up: the dimension of religious experience, in which God grants man grace and love. Reading Tischner’s most important works, one wants to say that they reveal the contemporary sense of St. Augustine’s old thought, “love and do what you will.”

The Tischnerian philosophical anthropology, which was a constant search for a simple and fundamental truth about man went through several stages. The first period was dominated by the influence of phenomenology and contemporary theories of values. The most important papers from this time were gathered in the book *Thinking in Values*, which was published in 1982. In the second stage, marked by a powerful influence of the philosophy of dialogue, drama was the main focus of Tischner’s thought – man is seen here, first and foremost, as a being involved in various dramatic strands. The fruit of this time, the 80’s, was *The Philosophy of Drama*. And finally the last stage, perhaps the most original, was crowned with *The Controversy Over the Existence of Man*. Tischner had intended to write it as early as in the 1980’s. The title, being a paraphrase of Ingarden’s work *The Controversy Over the Existence of the World*, is meant to underscore how much Tischner owed to his Master. On the other hand, it heralds a polemic he wished to launch against Ingarden. For, according to Tischner, only in the light of the question “who is man?,” can we say something sensible about the world. And man is, above all, a dramatic being that exists in the horizon of good and evil. Therefore, axiology and agathology take the place of ontology, which was central for Ingarden. The summation of that decade of Tischner’s philosophizing became, despite his own predictions, the already mentioned *The Philosophy of Drama*. He wrote about it thus:

In the meantime the original intention was changed and to good effect in my opinion: out of *The Controversy Over the Existence of Man* was born *The Philosophy of Drama*. The latter title better fits the thing that I am concerned with – the conception of man as a dramatic being. Avoiding unforeseeable obstacles, further parts of this philosophy may be expected.³

¹ J. Tischner, *Filozofia człowieka dla duszpasterzy i artystów* [The Philosophy of Man for Preachers and Artists], Kraków 1991, p. 7. See also *Spór o istnienie człowieka* [The Controversy Over the Existence of Man], Kraków 1998, p. 219.

² J. Tischner, “Etyka wartości i nadziei” [The Ethics of Value and Hope], In: *Wobec wartości* [Facing Values], Poznań 1982, p. 55.

³ J. Tischner, *Filozofia dramatu* [The Philosophy of Drama], Paris 1990, p. 22.

It is interesting that in the 90's, without abandoning his work on the philosophy of drama, Tischner returned to his original intention; the controversy over the existence of man became the final chord of his philosophical searches.

Let us consider more closely the main threads of Tischner's philosophy of man, following the three stages his ideas went through.

1. Man Facing Values

The way of thinking about man at the time of *Thinking in Values* is best rendered by the metaphor which Tischner liked to refer to: "Man is like a song passing through time. Who plays this song? Man himself is the instrument and the artist here."⁴ Man continuously creates himself, proceeding like an artist who looks at the score and builds a melody out of the sounds belonging to it. This metaphor portrays a dispute between the classical (substantial) and the contemporary (existential) conception of man. Putting it in greatly simplified terms, according to the former, the essence of man is something given and unchangeable: man can shape his character, influence what is accidental, but not his substance (essence). Contemporary philosophy claims the reverse: "A person is not any thing, substance or object,"⁵ and the most representative formula of this way of thinking says: "man's essence (*Dasein*) lies in his existence."⁶ There is no man as such, he only creates himself through existing, that is, by making choices, taking this or that action. In a way, Tischner tries to reconcile the two traditions, claiming that man is "a material which is shaped by exposing itself to the influence of values. Yet, it is a special material that shapes and is also shaped."⁷ The song metaphor seems to be closer to the existential conception of man, still Tischner underscores the role of the "score," which stands at least as a substitute of substance. Values are that "substantial" score by which man plays himself out. Man lives in the world of values. What does this mean?

When we say that our world is a world of values, we see particular affairs and objects around us. Maybe affairs, rather than objects. . . Our world is, in some indeterminate sense, a world ordered hierarchically. Affairs, objects, people follow for us a more or less firm hierarchical pattern.⁸

In his life man encounters, above all, the particular – meets living people, has concrete affairs to consider. At the same time, however, the particular is permeated by the axiological order. "Values stand before us as independent of our whims and categorically demand to be incarnated into life. The objective existence of values is sometimes called an ideal

⁴ J. Tischner, "Etyka wartości i nadziei," op.cit., p. 53.

⁵ M. Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, Tübingen 1986, op.cit., p. 47

⁶ Ibid., p. 42.

⁷ J. Tischner, "Etyka wartości i nadziei," p. 55.

⁸ J. Tischner, *Myślenie według wartości* [Thinking in Values], Kraków 1982, pp. 483–484.

¹⁴ existence.”⁹ Tischner is aware of the big dispute over values in contemporary philosophy, of axiology undergoing a profound crisis. In his many texts he writes extensively about Nietzsche’s transvaluation of values, phenomenological analyses of values by Husserl, Scheler or Ingarden, the positivistic critique of values and the questioning of axiology by Heideggerian spokesmen of the “truth of Being.”¹⁰ At times he even says that nowadays, “the foundations of axiology need to be found within the very womb of thinking, otherwise axiology will not fulfill hopes born in our crisis-situation.”¹¹ Yet, it seems that, in this phase of his philosophizing, Tischner sides with phenomenology and is close to the concepts of the already mentioned Max Scheler.

However, in a very original way, Tischner develops the theory of experiencing these values, which he understands in Scheler’s manner. He indicates a unique relation between values and the human person: “values are values because they are something for the human person and for the human person’s sake. . . . Man serves values by realizing them; values serve man – they save him.”¹² Within the space where man experiences values, the awareness of one’s own person is crucial, and yet even more essential is the presence of another man. Values reveal themselves when a man meets another man. Tischner writes:

One who has experienced an encounter can say he has originally experienced some particular good or evil, some tragedy, some freedom. . . . An encounter with the other is the key to axiology. Only thanks to the encounter do we see people on the hierarchically organized stage of life: we prefer and we understand the preferences of others.¹³

The experience of values is fully shaped in the encounter with the other. In this space, it is clear that the human person is an absolute and a unique value. Here, Tischner recalls the second formulation of the Kantian imperative, which states that a person, due to his value, cannot ever be just a means to an ends, but he must always be treated as an end. Kant wrote, “Act in such a way that you treat humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of any other, always at the same time as an end and never simply as a means.”¹⁴ However, Tischner states that, in the case of man, we are faced with a “value that has become a person.”¹⁵ It can be said that a particular value of a person, which appears in the event of an encounter, reveals to people the possibility of experiencing other values as well. Encountering a value evokes curiosity, nudges toward further searches, makes man capable of making discoveries. Tischner wrote,

⁹ J. Tischner, “Etyka wartości i nadziei,” op. cit., p. 63.

¹⁰ Cf. for instance *Myślenie według wartości*, esp. pp. 481–497.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 482.

¹² J. Tischner, “Etyka wartości i nadziei,” op. cit., pp. 86–87.

¹³ J. Tischner, *Myślenie według wartości*, p. 489. Cf. also the following statement: “the originary experience for human ethical self-knowledge is the experience of the other person,” p. 365.

¹⁴ I. Kant, *Uzasadnienie metafizyki moralności* [Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals], Warszawa 1984, p. 62.

¹⁵ J. Tischner, “Etyka wartości i nadziei,” op. cit., p. 87.

“The key to these encounters is the principle of discovery. Each time one must discover, must see, must sense what, here and now, is the best possible answer to the essential hope of the other.”¹⁶ The abstract sensitivity to values is made concrete in the encounter with the other: we discover values as needs, emotions, fears of the encountered person. A special role is given to the experience of mutual hope.

Tischner already wrote about the problem of hope – he devoted to it a great part of his first book.¹⁷ Here, hope turns out to have a special place in axiology, in the axiological space created by the encounter:

Experiencing another person through the prism of values is inextricably connected with the experience of a hope. It is always the case that either I propose a value for the other person to realize and I have a hope that the other will take up my proposition, or the other proposes something similar to me, cherishing a similar hope.¹⁸

Values demand recognition and realization. It is hope which directly pushes one to act, it is the dynamic factor which makes us fulfill this or that value. Tischner even speaks about a link between the experience of hope and the experience of the life-space.¹⁹ If I hope, if I am sensitive to hopes that other people have in me, then a wide space is opened for my life and action. It is with hope that I answer the call of values. Otherwise, problems with hope close the world making us “men from the underground:”

At times something goes wrong with human hope. It is as if hope dwindles in man, his life-space dwindles together with it. . . Instead of following his way, man feels compelled to search for an underground hideaway. . . The passage from the space of hope into the space of the underground is a fall that has a deep ethical meaning.²⁰

Let us remember that in describing this period of Tischner’s work we started with a song metaphor – man is like a song played from the score of values. All that we have already said builds upon this metaphor. Man creates himself through answering the call of values, fulfilling the hope that has appeared in the encounter with the other. The quality of this answer defines whom one really is, “depending on how one will answer the call, one might be said to be a traitor or a saint.”²¹

Where then does the truth about man lie? Tischner straightforwardly poses this question in the closing passage of his *Ethics of Value and Hope*. Yet, he states that he is unable to give a satisfactory answer, “Here, we cannot answer what the truth of man is. Every person must answer it

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 89. Tischner wrote a paper on the *sui generis* art of discovering, which is needed, especially in the contemporary world of *techne*, in “Sztuka etyki” [The Art of Ethics] in *Myślenie według wartości*, pp. 363–373.

¹⁷ Cf. J. Tischner, *Świat ludzkiej nadziei* [The World of Human Hope], Kraków 1975.

¹⁸ J. Tischner, “Etyka wartości i nadziei,” op. cit., p. 87.

¹⁹ Cf. J. Tischner, *Myślenie według wartości*, p. 415.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 415–416.

²¹ J. Tischner, “Etyka wartości i nadziei,” op. cit., p. 93.

16 alone, finding one's own hope, one's *ethos*, and one's predestined form of heroism."²² The answer to the question of the truth of man can only be general; such a ready-made truth does not yet exist. Man creates it only when recognizing values, making choices, embracing one's own hope and the hope of others. Is it at least possible to define the criteria according to which we evaluate the act or, rather, the creative process which constitutes the truth of man?

It is very difficult to answer this question. First, Tischner underscores that in the creative act the objective hierarchy of values is reflected, hence the idea of "thinking in values." So, it can be said that objective values constitute a stable point of reference and at the same time a particular criterion for a man creating the truth about himself. Second, Tischner often refers to Heidegger's analyses, in which one of the main human concerns is the concern about one's own authenticity, "The call to be yourself or to be what you are, also called the call to authenticity aims at directing those in flight . . . toward their silent conscience."²³ It is impossible here to enter deeply into the details of Heidegger's analytic of Dasein. Still, one thing is certain, thinking in values cannot be helpful in striving to be oneself authentically. Heidegger writes:

Here, as elsewhere, thinking in values is the greatest blasphemy imaginable against Being. To think against values therefore does not mean to beat the drum for the valuelessness and nullity of beings. It means rather to bring the clearing of the truth of Being before thinking, as against subjectivizing beings into mere objects.²⁴

The criterion for a man creating the truth of his own authentic existence is "the truth of Being." What do the spokesmen of the truth of Being and the followers of thinking in values have in common? What is the ultimate significance of Tischner's search for the truth of man in the period of thinking in values?

Truth-constitution is first of all a creative act. Man creates himself like an artist playing a song. The truth of man is then a specific work of art, and is thereby finally subject to aesthetic evaluation. The discipline which most deeply concerns the matters related to creating the truth of man and thereby is "knowledge about manners of being among people,"²⁵ is ethics. Yet, Tischner claims that "ethics is also a knowledge of an art. This art is concerned with man who is the only being of good will in the world."²⁶

It is worth drawing attention to the similarity between such a conclusion and solutions proposed by a current of contemporary ethics related to postmodernism. For instance, Todd May writes:

²² Ibid., p. 140.

²³ Ibid., p. 100.

²⁴ M. Heidegger, "Letter on Humanism," in *Basic Writings*, HarperCollins, pp. 213–266.

²⁵ J. Tischner, *Myslenie według wartości*, op. cit., p. 372.

²⁶ Ibid., p. 372.

The question of how one lives one's life apart from one's relations to others is not a matter for ethical intervention or persuasion, but an aesthetic matter that should be talked about in terms very different from those of obligations and restrictive values.²⁷

Furthermore, he states that a better life is one that promotes values, but its evaluation is more aesthetic than ethical in character.²⁸ That which man should be is a matter of aesthetics of life, rather than traditional moral judgments. This author does not negate the role of morality, he even admits that it is the central practice of our life, but it is not the only practice – as it cannot define one way of life for everyone. Man should live beautifully, while, for example, the life of a great artist and the life of an unknown teacher are, according to May, irreducible to each other.

In summary, the Tischnerian thinking in values ends in an aestheticization of the truth of man. To live truly, to be oneself, means finally to live beautifully, that is, to make one's life a work of art.

2. Man in Drama

The passage to *The Philosophy of Drama* constitutes a deepening of the reflection on the nature of man. Tischner underscores a very close relation between the concept of drama and the concept of man, "What is drama then? This concept points to man. Man lives in such a manner that he takes part in a drama, is a dramatic being. Man cannot live otherwise."²⁹ Drama is something multifaceted and multidimensional. Analyzing drama, we can talk about the relation of man to the stage, to the other, to God. We can study the dramatic time as the dynamic force of drama, or show various spaces – beauty, truth, and the good – in which the dramas of life show their various faces. In his book Tischner analyzes the above-mentioned structure of drama in a very detailed manner. Still, under all the analyses, beautiful metaphors and images, there is one thought that expresses the essence of drama:

Taking part in drama, man knows more or less clearly that, figuratively speaking, perdition or salvation is in his hands. To be a dramatic being means to believe, rightly or wrongly, that perdition or salvation is in a person's hands.³⁰

The various dramas which man lives out may be concerned with an innumerable quantity of greater and lesser matters. Yet, interwoven throughout all the dramas, there is a single most essential dramatic strand – man desires salvation and tries to escape perdition, and in a perspective thus defined the result of the strife eventually depends on him alone.

²⁷ T. May, *The Moral Theory of Poststructuralism*, The Pennsylvania State University Press 1995, p. 69.

²⁸ Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 90.

²⁹ J. Tischner, *Filozofia dramatu*, *op.cit.*, p. 13.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

An encounter with the other creates a particular dramatic space:

Encountering the other, I meet him within the horizon which makes the encounter possible at all, and which is its work as well. Hand in hand, the encountered other and I enter the space where something is better and something else is worse, something is good or evil. This space is not an ordinary Euclidean geometrical space, but a hierarchical space. . . Let us then say that the encounter is an opening of the agathological horizon of inter-human experience.³¹

In earlier descriptions, Tischner showed man as a being that moves in axiological space. It was also a space organized hierarchically, but the axiological order was given straightforwardly, as if in the light. Therefore, the experience of values made it possible to define the right direction of man's action clearly, by showing without ambiguity what was higher and what was baser.

It is not so in the agathological space – here everything is a problem, “the possibility of tragedy goes together with the possibility of triumph. Opening the former, drama simultaneously opens the latter.”³² The difficulty lies in the fact that good and evil remain entangled with each other and cannot be separated with precision. Recognizing the appearances of things is misleading and does not bring man closer to defeating evil. The key to the essence of what happens in the dramatic space is the experience of the other's face, “The face reveals itself as a gift of the agathological horizon, a horizon in which good and evil take the form of a drama, and drama heralds the possibility of the tragedy or victory of man.”³³ By revealing itself, the other's face makes one aware that we are in mutual proximity. I and Thou do not have two destinies, two dramatic strands, but just one in which I am for-the-other; “Thou are part of the history of my I, and I am part of the history of your Thou. Despite such permeation, each is oneself.”³⁴ The relationship between good and evil is thereby even more complicated, the tension between the possibility of salvation and tragedy becomes even more dramatic.

Having sketched the agathological space and its core experience of the face, Tischner analyzes concrete human dramas. He quotes examples from literary and philosophical works, he cites well-known passages from Shakespeare, Tolstoy, Dostoevsky, Kierkegaard. It is also characteristic that in his reflection the chosen stories decidedly tend to be tragic. He shows us characters who turn out to be hideous, rebellious, deceitful, ready to betray. No wonder, in the conclusion Tischner writes:

I am a betrayed being. All that I experience here confirms the truth of betrayal. In the Garden of Eden, the serpent puts me on trial, so I am not trusted. The ground grows thorns and thistles for me, so I live in a denied land.³⁵

³¹ Ibid., p. 53.

³² Ibid., p. 55.

³³ Ibid., p. 69. Cf. also p. 28.

³⁴ Ibid., p. 88.

³⁵ Ibid., p. 217.

In drama, evil prevails over the good. The last word of drama turns out to be damnation. 19

Man is too weak to lead the drama, all by himself, toward the triumph of good over evil. In this helplessness, man seems to be hemmed in by unfriendly forces, has no power to create a desired form of reality. Man lacks the clarity of perception and knowledge to recognize each situation. According to Tischner, the source of tragedy is always constituted by powerlessness and ignorance, which are man's destiny.³⁶ As long as one is left to rely only on oneself alone – and the philosophy of drama speaks only about this situation – one will not escape tragedy and damnation.

3. The Controversy Over the Existence of Man

Tischner's philosophy of drama ends without complete fulfillment. The truth about man is such that, left to himself, the protagonist of a drama heads for perdition. Therefore, the controversy about the existence of man begins with a profound reflection on the problem of evil. To capture the essence of evil Tischner seeks inspiration from classic authors: Dante, St. Augustine, Descartes, Kant. But the analyses of the most important conceptions of evil from the history of Western thought prepare ground for a contemporary perception of the problem. One claim here is of key value: "the Enlightenment did not overcome the evil of history, but, instead of the crimes of the superstitious, it introduced the crimes of the enlightened."³⁷ It was believed once that man did evil by remaining in the darkness of ignorance, because of the influence of dark forces which do not conform to reason. Therefore, an idea of knowledge was born which believed that by dissipating the darkness of ignorance we would gradually eliminate evil from the world.

In the meantime, it turned out that the most atrocious and massive crimes, whose symbols are Auschwitz and Kolyma, were committed under the banner and in the light of scientific theories that had been meant to save humanity. What then happened to man? Does man retain any autonomy or is he a cog in some demonic machine whose functioning he cannot significantly alter? Tischner wrote:

A builder of Auschwitz and Kolyma would like to prove that he takes no part in anything, that everything has gone on without him and behind his back. To make the acquittal clear, the annihilation of man is brought into perspective. What Hell has never achieved is what man undertakes to do – he wants to prove that what he was doing was not his deed, as he had never existed. That is how the idea of man's death is born.³⁸

Is it possible to say, after Auschwitz and Kolyma, that man exists? Or, as contemporary philosophy and art have come to see it often, (Tischner analyzes Gombrowicz's drama *The Marriage* which perfectly illustrates

³⁶ Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 54.

³⁷ J. Tischner, *Spór o istnienie człowieka* [The Controversy Over the Existence of Man], Kraków 1998, p. 35.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 57.

²⁰ this phenomenon) has man annihilated himself and become a mere player in a game? In light of this question Tischner will develop his controversy over the existence of man.

The first part of the controversy revolves around the concept of corporeality. Tischner endeavors to describe the mechanism of desire as a factor that opens man to the world of things, people and values. Tischner confronts two classical descriptions of man's desires with each other: the Aristotelian and the Hegelian. The analysis of this sphere leads to the conclusion that through one's corporeality one takes part in the drama of a particular logic: "The dramatic logic differs from deductive logic as in its key moments it presupposes freedom – choice."³⁹ Anthropology then is bound to face antinomies and paradoxes that are unsolvable from the perspective of the traditional deductive logic. The drama of corporeality manifests those contradictions, reveals the truth about man at the most fundamental level, and constitutes a particular point of reference for the subsequent reflections.

The problem of grace is another issue of great importance for the controversy over the existence of man. Tischner writes, "Man is a being that needs grace above all and is capable of receiving it. How must a human being be constituted to be capable of receiving grace?"⁴⁰ The reflection on grace is essentially bound to lead to the study of freedom. This is the focal point for all crucial differences between the ancient, mediaeval and modern conceptions of man, "A controversy over the nature of grace used to be a controversy over the existence of free will, now this controversy takes on features of a controversy over the existence of man."⁴¹ What is the essence of this difference? Aristotle's ethics and then Aquinas's ethics were based on the conviction that the world is harmonious. Therefore, achieving happiness is not particularly difficult for man who is endowed with a natural affinity for good. It is enough to show moderation, to follow reason in one's actions while applying Aristotle's rule of the golden mean, and then the harmony of the external world will find its reflection in man's interior. However, Tischner observes that:

[T]he man of The Nicomachean Ethics does not feel any need for grace. Nothing compels him: neither a crack in the sphere of being nor an encounter with evil. He does not need a savior to die for him. . . Hope implodes him from within and ruins him. It ruins the harmony he is grounded in. Hope is incompatible with the internal principle of balance, with the idea of the golden mean, which Aristotelian virtues hinge upon. Hope is madness amidst harmony.⁴²

The manner of understanding the relationship between freedom and grace shows important differences between the classical Thomist thought and contemporary philosophy. Tischner never hid his sympathy

³⁹ Ibid., p. 124.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 132.

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 136.

⁴² Ibid., p. 159.

for modern and contemporary liberalism. Arguments that solidify this sympathy, which appeared in various texts, also in journalistic form, have their final justification in *The Controversy Over the Existence of Man*. Thomism overlooks something important from the Christian teaching on grace: situating man inside a rationally ordered world, it is not able to reach the depth of freedom given through a grace that often acts against the logic of the world. Therefore, Tischner claims that, despite its other good points, “we cannot accept the thesis that Thomistic thinking about freedom is to be the paragon and cure for contemporary people.”⁴³ On the other hand, liberalism – regardless of its inherent dangers – points to human freedom in an interesting manner, a freedom which is first of all born out of grace.

Despite the issues sketched out above, one thing seems certain: reflection on grace leads thinking about man into a particular vicious circle. To leave it, Tischner proposes seeing man as a being that takes part in a religious drama. First of all, it is crucial that man participates in the order of love which opens to him the perspective of salvation. The analysis of the order of salvation, comprised of the descriptions of religious experiences of revelation, choice and finally salvation, constitutes at the same time a passage from reflection within the metaphors of evil to an attempt at sketching the metaphors of the good.

A religious drama starts from God revealing himself to man. Revelation does not mean to show something which has been concealed before, but it has the features of a confession, it presupposes a dialogical relationship that has to be preceded by God’s choosing of man. The choice is linked to a recognition of man as an extraordinary good. Thus, religious thinking fundamentally changes the understanding of good, it forces one to make a distinction between good and value:

Values are what appears in the light: they belong to the object, are rooted in a situation, given to us to admire (beauty) and to realize (morality). Good is something that remains in the shadows, is not from this world, and yet it still directs the light of values, shines for me, shines for my good.⁴⁴

This is a curious moment in the controversy over the existence of man. First, Tischner launches a *sui generis* polemic with his own conception of thinking in values, in which axiology and agathology were already differentiated. And yet it was values that were the central point of reference for man, were the “score” of how man was to create himself. Second, the reflection presented here can be viewed in the context of the debate on Christian values that took place in Poland in the 90’s. Tischner argued then that the endeavor to establish legal protection for Christian values trivializes the problem of Christianity’s presence in public life. His statements, which were not well-understood at that time, here find deep justification:

⁴³ Ibid., p. 162.

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 176.

Discovering the dimension of participation in the good is threatened by objectification in a value. For some time now there is a tendency in philosophy to substitute the concept of the good with the concept of values. Such means are an attempt to bring the good closer to phenomenological experience. Has this aim been achieved yet? Actually, the thing that is achieved is the aestheticization of the good: the good reduced to the order of values becomes an aesthetic value.⁴⁵

So how to avoid the aestheticization of the good? Which tools are to be used to capture that which remains hidden in the shadows?

Tischner answers that a change in thinking about man is necessary, that is, a passage from the logic of Being to the logic of dialogue. The logic of Being dominates Western philosophy. Its very peak is the Hegelian system, in which man liberates himself from subjectivity through thinking and enters the world of “objectified incarnations of reason” such as the Church or the State. The truth of man here is a part of the universal truth of Being. However, according to Tischner, “the logic of dialogue is of a higher order than the logic of Being. It is not Being that justifies the good, but it is the good that justifies Being.”⁴⁶ The dialogical conception of man derives its force from the event of the encounter of man with God, from the fact that man was chosen by God. It fundamentally changes the classical ontological relations – a finite being discovers that:

[D]espite the fact that his being is finite, he can receive God’s confessions and, as a free creature, justify his own being and the being of the world. But then, Hegelian, and not only Hegelian, objectification must give the pride of place to agathology.⁴⁷

Being chosen is crowned with justification. Through justification, the inimitable and unique value of the justified person is confirmed. Even more importantly, justification – in opposition to being chosen – seems to reach up to an inexhaustible source:

In the case of a finite creature, such as man, being chosen is inextricably connected with abandonment. This constitutes the tragedy of human choice. . . The logic of justification is different. Through justifying one person, it is possible to justify in him all people.⁴⁸

At the same time, justification creates conditions for the good to appear. The good does not come from being, it is prior to being. It needs, however, precisely defined conditions to occur. Being chosen and then justification constitute a space in which bearing the good is possible.

The culminating moment in Tischner’s analyses of the order of salvation is conversion, which reveals the whole essence of the religious drama of man. In philosophical conceptions, man striving toward per-

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 177.

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 187.

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 188.

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 198.

fection seeks his own nature, for instance, he is to become – as in Plato or later in Kant – a rational being through the development of thinking. It is not so in the space described by Tischner. To reach completeness means to undertake conversion, to become a new, completely different man. One does not do it, “in the name of one’s own nature, but in the name of a hope for a good that is located in the future.”⁴⁹ The future does not derive from the past, on the contrary, what is old must die. Tischner actually speaks about the death of the axiological-I that, as we know, was one of the key concepts of his earlier works, and which incarnates the immersion of man in values. Conversion means a passage from axiology to agathology.

One cannot achieve it alone – the key to conversion is an experience of the other in the agathological horizon. The essence of this experience lies in the fact that the persecutor lays down his life for his victim. Conversion then is not an intellectual kind of change, “conversion is not only the exchange of a false opinion for a true one, but also cleansing oneself of a persecutor’s stigma.”⁵⁰ The persecutor now becomes a bearer of hope. Hope changes one’s view of the world, it opens one up to the future. Good is realized through hope, “The reading of hope is the reading of the good that is approaching. Hope is possible only within a being which is finite and which has been touched by the infinite Good.”⁵¹ Conversion is finally possible thanks to grace, grace granted to man by God. Only then is the appearance of good revealed, whose essence is best rendered in the word “love” – “The root of man is love. All the rest revolves around love. Love is the fundamental way of participating in the good.”⁵²

Then, Tischner analyses the structure of man as the subject of drama. First, he reflects on the person as a “monad with no windows,” that is, a person who experiences his own alienation, otherness, who feels betrayed and deserted by his neighbors. This is the situation of a person fallen prey to loneliness. Subsequently, a moment of radical opening up onto others is unveiled, which is based, first of all, on Lévinas’ texts. In this opening up, the person as if loses himself, his identity is now grounded in devotion, sacrificing himself for the other. The person becomes a “being-for-the-other.” These analyses, which in many ways resemble the atmosphere of the Tischnerian *Philosophy of Drama*, show that in the space of the interpersonal drama there arise particular conditions for the appearance of the good. In fact, the structure of the person turns out to be “incarnate agathology.”

Thereby, and as if from a different side, we again approach the key thesis in the controversy over the existence of man: good overshadows being, the analysis of the “dramaturgy of good” goes before thinking in the “logic of being.” Tischner writes:

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 205.

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 209.

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 209.

⁵² Ibid., p. 214–215.

[T]he causality of the good does not coincide with the causality of being, it does not care about proportions, does not respect the sufficient condition, does not exhaust its powers while acting. . . . When a being acts, after some time, it feels tired and exhausted by action. When good acts, each of its good deeds does not exhaust it, but makes it more profound and provides strength.⁵³

Thus, good operates beyond the laws of being, the essence of its action can be rendered only in metaphors. Tischner recalls, for instance, the metaphor of giving birth. Giving birth is not a simple sequence of causal relations. What is born – although it is a being and can be described within the categories of being – comprises more than the sum of the causes which have led to its existence. Giving birth allows for the manifestation of something which, in some form, has already (perhaps always?) been there, but remained latent. The good also acts like grace, making the seemingly impossible real – powerlessness overcomes violence, a torturer sacrifices himself for the person he persecuted, a betrayer becomes a faithful bearer of hope. This exceptional and paradoxical power of the good inspires Tischner’s intuition to complement the old ontological argument with whose aid Anselm of Canterbury argued for the existence of God with an agathological argument. The greatest good ought to exist, so it is impossible that it might be otherwise. Above all, the agathological argument argues for the existence of man – the mutual bearing of hope, as the quintessence of the good’s form of action, leads to an “overcoming of man’s death,”⁵⁴ or, at least prepares the conditions for his rebirth.

The problem of good and evil designated the essential framework for *The Controversy Over the Existence of Man*. But toward the end Tischner concentrates on the question of freedom. One can speak about freedom in connection with other categories referring to being. Freedom can be understood as an ability to affect and control causal processes, then it is close to the concept of power. One could reduce freedom to cognitive terms – to be free means to understand the world, domesticate it through knowing the truth, and feel at home in it. Tischner consistently proposes to analyze freedom beyond ontological categories, “To understand the nature of freedom, one must reach up to the agathological level. Freedom is beyond being and non-being.”⁵⁵ What is the agathological meaning of the concept of freedom?

Freedom is a dramatic category, it manifests itself in relationships between person and person. Tischner’s analyses of various shades of freedom lead to the formulation of theses that express the essence of freedom, and at the same time they define the essence of man in the most complete manner. First, “freedom is a power which liberates hope . . . it is a grace which opens one up to grace.”⁵⁶ Thanks to freedom, man is never utterly defeated, he can always rise from the fall, in the abyss of despair there is always a glimmer of

⁵³ Ibid., p. 286.

⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 290.

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 298.

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 317.

new hope. Second, freedom remains in the closest connection with the good, ²⁵ this relationship plays itself out primarily in a person's interior, "It is the person, a concrete man who, in order to be good, cannot detest being good. The will to the good must be free. Freedom expresses the good and recognizes it as its own."⁵⁷ The good cannot appear out of the pure force of necessity, it has to be chosen and confirmed through a free choice of a conscious subject. Contrary to good, evil is pure slavery as it is bound by hatred.

Last but not least, freedom puts relationships between persons in the right perspective. Seemingly, the freedom of the other constraints me – wanting to broaden the scope of my freedom, I have to take it away from the other. Nonetheless, Tischner writes:

I am free by recognizing the freedom of the other. The proper way of possessing oneself is possible only when one renounces the drive to possess the other. By possessing oneself, one lets the other be. Letting the other be, we experience the good of our own freedom and in this experience we possess ourselves more profoundly.⁵⁸

Man is not fully himself in solitude. On the one hand, he exists thanks to the fact that the Absolute – God, that is, infinite Good – allows him to be. This internal dynamic of God's love, thanks to which the finite being participates in Infinity, is expressed by the Christian tradition in the mystery of the Holy Trinity. On the other hand, the deepest sense of human existence consists in passing on the received gift, that is, in being free and good toward others. Man is himself when letting the other be. Therefore, Tischner concludes his controversy over man's existence with a phrase which seems to bring together freedom and the good: "Thy freedom be done."

4. Conclusion

When considering the Western tradition, there appear three ways of speaking about man. The first one, which starts from ontology, pronounces that man is a being and, accordingly, endeavors to describe the human person within traditional ontological categories. The second one, which looks to contemporary theories of consciousness, understands man as a thinking, feeling and loving being. The third way speaks about man in the context of the mystery of good and evil. Nowadays, we face a confusion in the ways and languages of philosophy. This is not a good situation:

Ambiguity in the case of language makes the three-fold language shatter the image of man. What is shattered is not easily mended again. The shattered image of man is indicative of the thought about the death of man.⁵⁹

Therefore, Tischner consistently strives to show the primacy of agathology, he arduously justifies the thesis of the supremacy of the logic of the

⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 318.

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 334.

⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 318.

26 good over the logic of being. Analyses conducted in this spirit are crowned with the final words of *The Controversy Over the Existence of Man*, which are “Thy freedom be done.”

This phrase does not unequivocally settle the controversy over the existence of man, it does not deprive of arguments those who, describing man in terms taken from the “logic of being,” say that man is dead. It rather seems to say that man can always begin to exist – even if dead, he can be reborn from his own ashes. It is possible thanks to the good, which is prior to being. It is only the drama of the good – which plays itself out in the space of love, beyond being and non-being – that can finally lead to the birth of man. Thus, only agathology could be the key to the right understanding of man.

What should the language of agathology be like? What terms could capture the mystery of the drama of good and evil from which man is born? These questions are not systematically answered by Tischner’s teachings. In *The Controversy Over the Existence of Man* we will find no unified systematic language of agathology. It seems that, due to the fact that the relationship between man and the good and evil has its own dramatic character, the language of the philosophy of drama is the most suitable at this level. Indeed, here the author uses the results of his earlier studies. At the same time, however, it is clear that the philosophy of drama can only constitute an introduction to agathology, that the resolution of the stated controversy requires going beyond the sphere of what can be comprehended by the language of drama. In this sense, the logic of the good still awaits for a systematic study and Tischner’s analyses open a “horizon for further reflection.”

In the end, one more thing is worth underscoring. We have already mentioned Tischner’s polemics with Thomism, which were received by many as undercutting Christianity. Meanwhile, reading Tischner’s books, especially *The Controversy Over the Existence of Man*, one is struck by the fact how deeply his thinking is rooted in the Christian tradition. Tischner does not treat Christianity as a besieged fortress that has to be defended against the attacks of the contemporary world. He rather attempts to see the world as an inexhaustible source of inspiration, which nowadays, like in the centuries past, allows for a better understanding of man. Strengthened by such a conviction, he does not fear dialogue with other traditions, does not avoid speaking the language of modern and contemporary philosophy, which is centrally interested in man, not in God. This opposition, so prominent now, may actually turn out to be illusory, especially since in the Christian tradition – more than in any other – the destinies of God and man are very closely linked, and the search for the nature of God often comes close to the search for the truth about man (its best example being Augustine’s *On the Trinity*).

Man is at the center of attention of contemporary philosophy. Tischner, by writing his books about man and engaging in the controversy over the existence of man, situates himself in this movement. However, his

reflections seem to convince us that soon the situation may change and 27
“after adventures of understanding and misunderstanding man alone, we
may yet again desire to understand God.”⁶⁰ Tischner shows in his writings
that these two dimensions of reflection actually permeate and complete
each other.

⁶⁰Ibid., p. 324.