



In more modern (post-Cartesian) theoretical systems values are recognized as a specific domain which is not identical with being, while the question of their mode of existence is solved in two principally different ways, i.e. either in the spirit of axiological subjectivism or objectivism.

That is why Stróżewski, while presenting the history of axiological thought, decides to accept the semantic opposition of "metaphysical" explanations of transcendentals *versus* modern non-metaphysical (ontologically neutral) theories of values. At the same time he emphasizes the fact that modern theories of values are largely derived from Descartes's radical conceptual change which has led to the acceptance of "the thinking subject", the consciousness determining being, for a basis of philosophical considerations.

Yet, in opposition to Stróżewski, let us ask whether Descartes's reversal in philosophy did not simultaneously create a foundation of modern metaphysics. Is Descartes's heritage, i.e. modern theories of values, really as non-metaphysical as it is commonly claimed?

Perhaps after Cartesianism there ceased to exist traditional metaphysics, the theory of being – the world, while there emerged the foundations of the theory of original ("primeval") being, the "consciousness", which has given rise to the intellectual fiction of man, "the cognizing being", and which has even constituted the external world in its remote consequences (E. Husserl's standpoint). Let us recall M. Heidegger's well-known statement: "When man becomes the first and proper *subiectum*, then it means: man becomes this being on which all being is based because of its Being and its truth. Man becomes the centre of the reference (*die Bezugsmittle*) of being as such. This is possible only if the apprehension of being as a whole is transformed".<sup>3</sup>

As a conceptual expression of the modern view of the world, the Cartesian philosophy contains at least two metaphysical propositions, namely, that being exists and that it has a conceptual nature ("cogitatum"). It is interesting to note that with the passage of time Descartes's "thinking ego" becomes peculiarly narrowed down. For Kant "intellect" is limited merely to selected "cognitive faculties"; Nietzsche rejects the concept of "subject", claiming that "there is no 'existence' beyond doing";<sup>4</sup> finally, Schopenhauer retains only "will" from all the active faculties of the soul.

It seems that having initially endowed the cognizing subject with the highest prerogatives, with the passage of time philosophy then restricted their range. In consequence, the scope of the unknowable was constantly expanding. For Kant the unknowable comprised "the thing in itself", while for Schopenhauer – the whole external world. Deprived of its reference to being, philosophy gradually turns into "anthropology".<sup>5</sup>

These aspects should be emphasized because the assertions of modern theories of values, as distinguished by Stróżewski, are based precisely on philosophy understood as anthropology. The full set of these propositions runs as follows:

1. Values are different from being; they may only be attributed to being.
2. There are many different groups and realms of values, though the criteria of their divisions are unclear.
3. Values have a "weak" ontological status (in comparison with being).
4. The subject calls values into existence on the basis of axiologically neutral being.
5. The subject constitutes at least the necessary condition of a proper "discovery" or "reading" of values.
6. The cognition of values is a cognition *sui generis*, i.e. a particular experience.
7. The theory of values creates a separate domain of inquiry, i.e. axiology.

It is impossible to accept any one of these propositions without accepting the essentially metaphysical thesis about man – the creator of values (or the creator of "the world", as in Husserl).

In turn, the acceptance of the thesis results in considerable difficulties for modern axiological approaches, as, for example, troubles in determining various categories and varieties of values and their

<sup>3</sup>M. Heidegger: *Czas światoobrazu*, "Odra", 1974, no. 9, p. 70.

<sup>4</sup>F. Nietzsche: *Z genealogii moralności (Zur Genealogie der Moral)*, Warszawa 1908, p. 41.

<sup>5</sup>And thus "the world" becomes reduced to the scope of "culture".

hierarchy, as well as the controversial problem of the mode of existence of values. Even in the considerations of axiological "objectivists" (e.g. Scheler and Ingarden), the question of the mode of existence of values (or the idea of values) can hardly be regarded as solved.

The outline of the historical perspective and the exposure of the metaphysical premises of modern inquiries into values is necessary because one of the central problems in Stróżewski's explorations is an attempt to reconcile the theory of transcendentals with some findings of modern theories of values; in a sense, it is an attempt to bring together two different trends of axiological investigations.

Let us ask, therefore, whether such a reconciliation is possible and if it is worth-while to achieve it.

The answer to the first question would depend on the following condition. A reconciliation of this kind seems possible only in so far as one may reconcile two contradictory metaphysical assumptions, i.e. "man as a perceiver of being" with "man determining being", and "being essentially evolving into man" with "being whose essence is inscribed into man's experience".

The answer to the second question must be preceded by an attempt to examine the causes of the special attractiveness of modern axiological approaches. It seems that the latter, together with Descartes's metaphysical thesis, have inherited the other important component of the Cartesian philosophy, namely, the fiction of reliable cognition or the cognition without assumptions.

This cognition, which in Kant's "critical" version was to eliminate traditional metaphysics, was also to dispense with any ontological propositions.<sup>7</sup>

But how can one know it is valid and reliable?

In order to recognize the validity of some cognition one must obtain its cognition through cognitive acts of a higher order and the latter, in turn, should be verified by acts of a still higher order etc. — or to accept a priori the validity, for instance, of the first level of cognition. The fiction of "reliable" cognition passes from *regressus in infinitum* to *petitio principii*. Nevertheless, its vigour proves surprising and each of the post-Cartesian philosophical systems recommends itself for the validity of the analytical method it offers. The Cartesian understanding of the philosophical method has become something of "opinie communis" of modern philosophical explorations. Even such essentially different trends in twentieth-century philosophy, as phenomenology or neo-positivism, share the conviction that they construct philosophical systems without assumptions, that they create the first (and last) philosophy.

However, perhaps no philosophy can do without assumptions and the propositions accepted as assumptions in modern theories of values bear fruit in the form of the difficulties which emerge in particular matters. Let us consider some examples.

Let us assume that values are something "added" to being and that they are granted the mode of existence which is weaker than that of being. For instance, it is claimed<sup>8</sup> about moral values that they are characterized by the atemporal mode of existence, different from the temporal existence of acts — carriers of values. Thus, for example, moral evaluation is formulated after the cessation of its real carrier, when the act in which a value has been realized comes to an end.

If we assume that there are different and separate domains of values, then what sense (and ontological status) has "value in general" which, after all, constitutes a basis of the categorial distinction (distinction of variants)?

Why, for instance, among the so-called aesthetic categories, are there so many ethical concepts (the tragic, the comic, pathos, the sublime, nobility etc.) and cognitive concepts (mimesis, veracity, realism)?

What role is played in being by the so-called negative values and what is their mode of existence in relation to being itself and to the mode of existence of positive values?

<sup>6</sup>To use this concept after Heidegger.

<sup>7</sup>Providing foundations for itself.

<sup>8</sup>For instance R. Ingarden states: "In this respect moral values would have to be granted not only the ability to survive time but also the ability to undergo no changes as to the nature of value and its level in time", *Studia z estetyki (Studies in Aesthetics)*, vol. 3, Warszawa 1970, p. 241.

Most probably the latter problems cannot be solved fully and generally for all the domains of values. For instance, the mode of existence of "ugliness", as an aesthetically negative phenomenon, is probably different from the mode of existence of ethical evil. It seems that only ethical evil may be granted the destructive role in relation to being which W. Stróżewski regards as the basic property of all negative values.

Such difficulties, among others, appear in the approaches which accept the assumptions of modern theories of values. As has been mentioned above, the novelty of Stróżewski's attitude consists in the attempt of combining the description of values with the inquiry into their ontological foundations (transcendentals), i.e. combining axiology with metaphysics.

It is not easy to decide unequivocally whether Stróżewski's propositions are closer to modern axiological systems or to old theories of being comprehended in terms of "the goods". For example, when he states that "the limits of our world are determined by our cognition"<sup>9</sup> and, then, that "truth is an antecedent condition of being"<sup>10</sup>, it seems that he appears primarily as a representative of the principal metaphysical thesis of modern theories of values. Yet, in opposition to most of these theories,<sup>11</sup> he regards values as "modes of existence" or "axiological-existential moments of being"<sup>12</sup> and such a description of their nature places values in the categorial order of "being", among the modes of existence appropriate to being.

According to Stróżewski, the problem of the relation of values to transcendentals may be solved in two ways.

In a weaker interpretation, transcendentals are (after Kant) regulative ideas (not ontologically grounded), which nevertheless constitute the necessary conditions of the sensibleness of human actions and possibilities of the actual realization of truth, the good, and beauty.

In a stronger interpretation, transcendentals are ontologically founded in being which conditions the realization of the modes of existence, identical with particular values.

The author of the book tends to accept the stronger interpretation of transcendentals. He asks: "Is not being, as a condition of the realization of the good, the good itself?"<sup>13</sup> And then he states: "In its essence existence is something good. It is both good and the good, at the same time. But it is the good in the most fundamental sense of the word and, similarly to existence itself, it cannot be ultimately defined."<sup>14</sup>

Thus, it seems that in this way we acquire an opportunity to determine the nature of values in the ontological dimension and to bring down transcendentals to the sphere of the realization of values in things. Nevertheless, some doubts still remain.

Let us begin with the fact that modern axiologies commonly assume the separateness of many basic domains of values (cognitive, ethical, aesthetic, utilitarian etc.). If we accept the concept of a value as a "mode of existence", proposed by Stróżewski, then should we not simultaneously agree that the same valuable thing (e.g. a literary work), combining artistic, cognitive and ethical values, exists in several modes at the same time?

Thus, for instance, are objects of the natural world, possessing aesthetic values (containing values of this kind), characterized by still another mode of existence, different (aesthetic?) from their proper mode, i.e. "real"?

Finally, does not the acceptance of the thesis that existence itself is axiologically positive imply that all negative values are somehow automatically granted the principal role of negating existence,

<sup>9</sup> Stróżewski: *op. cit.*, p. 76.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 76.

<sup>11</sup> Prof. Stróżewski states that this view refers to the understanding of transcendentals by Prof. T. Czeżowski and to the earlier conceptions of St. Thomas Aquinas (*Ibid.*, p. 88, 89).

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 86.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 92.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 94, 95.

when in fact only some of the negative values (especially ethical values) have such a destructive character?

Let us, therefore, consider the problem again. Stróżewski's statement about existence as a basis of all valuable states of things is undoubtedly valid. Even if we accept that only man creates values, endowing with them axiologically neutral being, then man's existence precedes (and conditions) all the acts of value creating. In this connection, if one may say so, the being "endowed" by man – creator of values, is also valuable in a way.

Apparently difficulties arise from the acceptance of the axiological thesis about separate categories and domains of values as a premise of the argumentation. Trying to avoid the commitment of the so-called "naturalistic error"<sup>15</sup> (i.e. the identification of some values with others of a different nature), modern theories of values regard particular groups of values as qualitatively separate and specific sets (ethical values are then different from aesthetic values, the latter, in turn, are different from practical values etc.). If the distinguished groups of values are characterized by the moment of being (the mode of existence), there emerges a picture of the reality consisting of objects of different forms of existence, or internally heterogeneous.

Therefore, it is perhaps worth-while to subject to revision the axiological thesis about the multiplicity of the domains of values, the more so, that various theorists set up many different "lists" of the domains of values, while the very criteria of their division are by no means obvious. Should we therefore completely give up the proposition contained in the arguments of the Aristotelian – Thomistic orientation that being in itself is valuable, while the differences between forms of its valueableness have a conceptual character?

Let us therefore consider to what extent the very concept of "veracity" is contained in the theory of transcendentals. Some assistance may be here provided by the so-called classical definition of truth, presented by Stróżewski in the formulation after St. Thomas Aquinas.<sup>16</sup>

As it is well known, this classical definition, stating that "truth is an adequacy of thought and thing",<sup>17</sup> has repeatedly been criticized. In spite of that, till today it has remained a fundamental assumption of both natural sciences, with factual references, and all generalized reflection about reality.

Let us start with a familiar intuition of "veracity" which accepts as true (i.e. having a positive cognitive value) the result of a certain cognitive operation – a proposition about reality. The verification of such "veracity" is possible, for instance, by a multiple repetition of the original cognitive operation (the criterion of "intersubjectivity"). An example of a proposition "truthful" in this sense may be found in any thesis of the natural sciences, such as an assertion about a phenomenon or a "physical" process.

On the side of being the assertion finds a counterpart in, let us say, a certain real state of things. In the order of reality the state is already no longer "truthful" but something simply existing, remaining in the same relation with other factual states of things and the whole existence. As such, it does not need to be discovered and no cognitive "confirmation" can change its contents or its ontological status.

Thus we seem to have as if two separate ontological domains: being as a possible object of cognition though independent of it and of cognition directed towards being and independent of being. The agreement (adequacy), mentioned in the classical definition of truth, appears therefore as a necessary metaphysical condition of the sensibleness of all cognitive acts. This also implies a certain order of being, the fact that being "allows" cognition, although it could merely exist.

In the aspect of the cognizing consciousness this agreement also means "the good" since it creates precisely a possibility of a conscious reference of the subject to being, i.e. the understanding of the

<sup>15</sup>E.g. according to G.E. Moore, although his understanding of "the good" as a simple undefinable quality raises some objections.

<sup>16</sup>In Stróżewski's book the study entitled "Trzy wymiary prawdy" (*Three Dimensions of Truth*) (St. Thomas Aquinas, *De veritate*, Q 1, AA. 2) is fully devoted to this question.

<sup>17</sup>In the original: *veritas est adaequatio rei et intellectus*.

nature or at least certain properties of being. Thus, veracity is not a variant of particular values but rather a certain general good available to man. On the other hand, a false assertion (in this sense of negative value), if one may say so, is ontologically "empty" since it has no counterpart in any transcendent (and objective) states of things. Anyway, no assertion, true or false, changes anything in the endowment of being as being. Thus, the statement that any negative value (for instance, a false predicate) turns against existence does not appear sufficiently motivated. It is rather the practice of human activity in the world that happens to be destructive in respect to existence, yet one should also note that such a practice may arise from premises both true (in the sense of "corresponding to the nature of being") and false. Nevertheless, it is subject to the ethical criterion, appearing as a good or evil (evil-doing) practice in ethical terms.

Returning to the question of selecting the manner of describing values, it seems that we may repeat after Stróżewski that on the basis of the theory of transcendentals we can still understand much of the world surrounding us.

Studies collected in Stróżewski's book are characterized by a varying degree of approaching the concept of transcendentals.

Thus, there are studies in which he seems to speak as if from the standpoint of modern theories of values in their phenomenological variety.<sup>18</sup>

There are also studies in which he tries to combine the Aristotelian – Thomistic thought with some more recent philosophical systems.<sup>19</sup>

Finally, there are studies – in my opinion the best – in which transcendentals constitute the main component of Stróżewski's perspective of examining the world.<sup>20</sup>

However, the main virtue of Stróżewski's inquiries is the fact that they create a possibility of reconsidering quite important matters and of searching for solutions of basic questions, sometimes in agreement with the author of the book and sometimes in opposition to his views.

<sup>18</sup> Particularly the study *O pojęciach piękna (On the Concepts of Beauty)*, Stróżewski: *op. cit.*, p. 312–330.

<sup>19</sup> Especially the main study in the volume, *Transcendentalia i wartości (Transcendentals and Values)*, *ibid.*, p. 111–112.

<sup>20</sup> E.g. the study entitled *O naturze Dobra św. Augustyna (On the Nature of the Good according to St. Augustine)*, *ibid.*, p. 131–148.

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