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Karol Wojtyła's philosophy of freedom

“Only true adherents of eternal law enjoy true freedom”

St. Augustine

“Freedom is an ambiguous concept”

Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel

Philosophical search for freedom – introduction

The question of human freedom and a derivative problem regarding free will has become a critical point of philosophical analysis, especially since the time of St. Augustine. This explorer and promoter of the world of internal experiences, the sphere of subjectivity, put the question of freedom of human will at the center of his anthropological analysis. Since then, freedom has been one of the fundamental issues of European philosophy, developed in ontological and metaphysical contexts on the one hand, and existential and ethical on the other. What is the essence of the phenomenon of freedom and what role does it play in human “self-creating” (Kierkegaard)? The father of modern philosophy, Descartes, pointed to freedom as the foundation of human dignity: “I don’t find the idea of anything bigger than it; so that it is thanks to it that I recognize that I am, to some extent, created in the image and likeness of God” (Descartes 1958, p. 76). Hegel saw freedom as something most fundamental to human life: “as the substance of matter is weight, so the substance, the essence of spirit is freedom,” (Hegel 1958, 1,26) he wrote. It would be difficult here – signal at least – to draw a map of problems and concepts in the field of philosophy of freedom. Jan Galarowicz made a right synthetic remark

about the history of freedom in philosophy: “Initially, the idea of freedom was understood as a purely social category: some people were born as free beings and others as slaves. In contrast, late-Antiquity stoicism and Christianity grant freedom to every human being because he is human” (Galarowicz 2017, p. 233). Freedom becomes a moment of human structure, and thus a natural right. What is this phenomenon of freedom?

Is freedom any choice, not regulated by any values or normativity? I am free, so I can do everything I want and my freedom is pure? Paul Ricoeur, a French thinker of the hermeneutic trend, used the term “wild freedom” to describe freedom understood in this way. This freedom is unrestricted and striving to fulfill my desires, regardless of any axiological or interpersonal contexts. Jean Paul Sartre pointed out that freedom is not only the highest value for man, but also his curse; after all, we are “condemned to be free”, and it functions in the sphere of axiological nihilism. Whatever we choose, nothing will come of it, hence man with his freedom is “a useless passion.” Is freedom, let’s keep asking, ethically neutral or is it essentially related to responsibility for the Other, as Emmanuel Levinas wanted? In this case, freedom is strictly ethical. Is freedom always a potential possibility of choosing good or evil (Nicolai Hartmann) or is it assigned to choose only good, because evil enslaves us, deprives us of freedom? Or maybe a man is not free, and his sense of choice and decision making is an illusion generated by neuronal functions in our brain? In naturalistic trends of cognitive science and neuroscience, attempts are made to justify such a thesis, and Libet’s famous experiment is just one way of such a strategy. The brain knows earlier than we ourselves what decision we will make – it is announced in popular science magazines, pointing to the “illusion of freedom” we live in. Much has been written about the weaknesses of such views, pointing not only to methodological simplifications, but also to over-interpreting the results of similar experiments (Strzyżyński 2013, p. 83-102; Cf. also: Bremer 2013). Is freedom a value or a curse for man, an opportunity or a threat? Erich Fromm in his once-famous book talked about the phenomenon of “escape from freedom”, indicating that assigning man’s free choice to some group, leaders, political party can be a comfortable life attitude in which a person getting rid of freedom does not feel responsibility for his actions. Józef Tischner wrote about the “unfortunate gift of freedom”, discussing Poles’ problems with social and political freedom regained after 1989. The value that appeared to be desired and the most important, now, after the fall of communism, became a burden and gave rise to challenges that we did not easily deal with. On the other hand, it is difficult not to notice, especially in the context of the twentieth century experience, human aspirations to regain freedom in socio-political systems programmatically trying to take away or drastically limit citizens’ freedom, called totalitarian systems. For the

struggle for freedom, people can suffer and even sacrifice their lives. This indicates the rank of this value. Glorification of freedom on the one hand, and its banalization, trivialisation, on the other – the contemporary approach to freedom seems to be marked by some fundamental ambivalence, not to say a contradiction. A contemporary philosopher writes: “In the consciousness of modern man one can notice a certain paradox. On the one hand, freedom appears to him as a great value; you can even talk about the cult of freedom. At the same time, the attitude related to anthropology that reduces man to the animal aspect, which denies freedom, is intensifying. [...] Perhaps the cult of freedom is essentially a mask imposed on disbelief in freedom” (Galarowicz 2009, p. 139).

Karol Wojtyła, a Polish thinker, has inscribed himself in all this complicated and cacophonous landscape of contemporary philosophy of freedom. Growing out of classical philosophy, open to modern and contemporary thought, he created excellent, I think, still underestimated texts. Roman Ingarden once said that Wojtyła is the largest, though without the possibility of full development (as a result of more and more new functions in the Church), philosophical talent in Poland after World War II. His concept of human freedom is one of the most interesting threads of Wojtyła's philosophy of man. This became apparent after 1978 in his activities and papal teaching. Often called the “Pope of Freedom,” he placed great emphasis on this foundation of human existence in his magisterial and pastoral teaching. He recognized the right to freedom as one of the most important human rights of which he was a tireless preacher. The problem of freedom was well thought out on a philosophical basis. He undertook it many times in his works, and most fully analyzed it in his most fundamental philosophical work entitled *Person and Act* (1969). Wojtyła's ontology of man – as emphasized by the expert of his philosophy, Jan Galarowicz – contains five pillars: the concept of consciousness, the philosophy of freedom, the relationship of man with values, analysis of corporeality and the theory of interpersonal relations (theory of participation and love; Cf. Galarowicz 2014, p. 131). The philosophical vision of freedom that emerges from the abovementioned monograph by Wojtyła deserves analytical research attention, which this article wants to be a modest contribution to.

Self-determination as an expression of freedom

Karol Wojtyła highly valued experience in his noetic function, which was hardly present in classical thought. It probably resulted from his interest in the mysticism of St. John of the Cross, to whom he devoted his Roman doctorate. His subsequent fascination with German phenomenology deepened his confi-

dence in experience as a source of legitimate knowledge, especially knowledge of man, hence the broadly understood “human experience” will constitute the epistemological foundation of his anthropology. Andrzej Szostek reasonably notes; “A characteristic feature of Wojtyła’s entire philosophical anthropology is that he wants to base it on properly understood human experience” (Szostek 2013, p. 47).¹ On the other hand, according to Wojtyła, the most complete way of insight into the essence of man is to see the act, experience of the act and its phenomenological description and hermeneutic explanation – a person reveals himself in a special way in philosophical analysis in an act. In an act of man, his personal agency („I act”) Wojtyła noticed this phenomenon of his conscious activity, which is able to reveal the truth about man, reveal his essence, hence the title of the above-mentioned work. Man becomes, after all, morally good or bad through his acts and in his acts. Becoming human is shaped by his acts. And here we discover the moment of freedom, one of the inalienable elements of the structure of becoming human, of his agency. We read: “Together with perpetration – through real inclusion in it – freedom is not only about the action itself, about the act that personal “I” is the perpetrator of, but about good or moral evil, that is, becoming man as a good man or bad” (Wojtyła 1994a, p. 148). Freedom is revealed to us in an experience that Wojtyła briefly describes: “I can – I don’t have to”. This is not only the content of consciousness, but also a manifestation of dynamism proper to man. Between these “I can” and “I do not have to” poles, a human “I want” is born, as a dynamic of the will, of the power of human choices, of wanting. On the one hand, freedom appears to be the decisive moment for human agency (after all, I cannot feel the perpetrator of something that lies beyond my freedom), and on the other is the element constituting the structure of “man acts” in its separation from everything that happens in man. Freedom allows us to understand more fully the reality of man as a dynamic, acting subject (activity). Only in the area in which “I act” am I responsible for my actions, so the moral moment is included.

Wojtyła, analyzing the above issues, comes to the discovery of the structure of self-determination, characteristic of human existence. “Self-determination is the essence of human freedom” (Wojtyła 1994b, p. 426-427). One can say that self-determination is an experimentally given structure of human freedom. The foundation of self-determination is self-possession. After all, one cannot make acts of self-determination without self-possession: “You can only decide about what you really have” (Wojtyła 1994a, p. 152). This points to the

¹ Wojtyła wrote about the knowledge of man in the context of philosophical anthropology: “We must look for the basis of understanding him in experience and in a full and comprehensive experience that is free from any systemic a priori” (Wojtyła 1994b, p. 425).

momentous issue: "A person is one who possesses himself and also who is possessed only by himself" (Wojtyła 1994a, p. 152). Scholastics expressed it in the phrase: "persona est sui iuris". Wojtyła reveals in his analyzes one more moment, necessary for the functioning of the structure of self-determination, namely self-mastery, the dominion of man "over" himself, where the person controls himself. In the acts of self-determination, the nature of the human person is revealed, indicating that man controls himself and exercises this fundamental power towards himself, which no one can exercise for him. In the world of a-personal beings, the will has no *raison d'être*, while in relation to the world of persons it appears as their constitutive figure. This is one of the fundamental differences between the animal world and man: "dynamism at the level of nature is opposed to dynamism at the level of a person precisely through the fact of self-determination as the basis from which the action itself, its direction and purposefulness arise. Dynamism at the level of nature lacks this particular dependence on one's own "self", which characterizes the dynamism of a person" (Wojtyła 1994a, p. 162)². Self-determination as an attribute of a person is freedom. Wojtyła wrote: 'Freedom therefore appears as a person's property related to the will, with the specific 'I want', which includes [...] the experience 'I can – I don't have to'. Freedom proper to man, freedom of the person through the will, is identified with self-determination as the experimental and the most complete reality – and the most fundamental at the same time" (Wojtyła 1994a, p. 161). Freedom is an attribute of the will of man, it is an effect of dependence on one's own self. Apart from the space of this dependence, we have a space of necessity in which there can be no question of self-determination and agency. It is worth paying attention to this moment of "dependence", which is key in the discussed concept. After all, freedom is most often understood just outside all dependencies. This is Wojtyła's interesting insight, worthy of comprehensive development. It is also worth noting that self-determination is a kind of experience data, not just a theoretical construct resulting from some systemic principles. Wojtyła himself noted: "In order to penetrate the personal structure of self-determination, we must start from the broadly understood human experience" (Wojtyła 1994b, 424). Characteristic in this context is that Wojtyła rarely uses the conceptual category "freedom", entangled in countless theoretical presuppositions, most often using the term "self-determination", which he derived from the experimental view of man in his agency.

² „The theory of self-determination states that man is a self-creating being in his moral actions" (Galarowicz 2014, p. 140).

Transcendence of a person in the context of self-determination and will power

Man transcends his subjectivity in intentionality, crossing the border between subjectivity and objectivity (horizontal transcendence). Wojtyła, however, draws attention above all to the transcendence of the person in an act, which is achieved through self-determination (vertical transcendence). This reveals the mentioned dependence on one's own self (self-dependence), its superiority. Wojtyła wrote: "Man is free – it means that in dynamizing his subject he depends on himself" (Wojtyła 1994a, p. 165). Therefore, freedom implies that the human being will establish a concrete, individual 'I' – only then does the subject become an object for himself, creating a structure of 'objectification', constituting a *conditio sine qua non* of freedom: 'Objectification namely conditions self-dependence, which includes the basic meaning of freedom' (Wojtyła 1994a, p. 165). The author of *Person and Act* emphasized that there is strict proportionality between the degree of awareness of action and awareness of the value realized in an act and the degree of experiencing self-determination. And "the more clearly [man – K.S.] experiences self-determination, the clearer his own agency and responsibility are in experience and awareness" (Wojtyła 1994b, p. 426). The more I act as a human being, engaging my deepest being.

Wojtyła understands self-determination in the context of the will being used by the human person as self-determination. Besides the ontic moment, will reveals the aspect of authority. We read: "After all, we call the will not only what it reveals, and at the same time updates the structure of self-possession and self-mastery, but also what man uses, what he uses to achieve his goals" (Wojtyła 1994a, p. 167). Therefore, the will is not so much about the person, but first and foremost depends on the person, therefore it is different and lower. A person has a radically superior position to the will, which is expressed by the formula: "I can want or not want", which clearly reveals the person's power over the will. The will appears as the "power of the freedom of the person" (Cf. Wojtyła 1994a, p. 167), the "central power of the human soul" (Wojtyła 1994b, p. 426), in which the structure of self-determination is realized. Man uses his will, realizing self-determination, being the perpetrator of an act, making a fundamental act of self-determination. Man dynamizes as a person through freedom, and its manifestation is precisely the power of the will. Wojtyła even uses the term "instinct of freedom", wanting to emphasize that freedom is the natural environment of human acts arising from the basic structure of self-determination. In a way probably the most complete freedom is manifested in man in his ability to choose, which presupposes some independence from objects in the intentional order. Of course, there is no question of the lack of conditioning by objects or values. "For it is not freedom from

objects, from values, but on the contrary – freedom to them or even better – freedom for them: for objects, for values” (Wojtyła 1994a, p. 177). This moment “to”, “for” inscribed in the dynamism of human freedom is very important in the discussed concept.

Freedom and conscience vs. truth

In his analysis of the will captured in its personal dynamics, Wojtyła sees a very important moment, namely “reference to the truth”. “A person is independent of the objects of his own actions through a moment of truth that is contained in every authentic decision or choice” (Wojtyła 1994a, p. 183), he wrote. Dependence on truth seems to belong to the constitutive moments of human freedom. The truth is the limit of personal autonomy, after all, human freedom is not absolute independence, but self-dependence, which includes this fundamental moment of dependence on truth. It is this moment that constitutes the spiritual character of the dynamism of the human person and his fulfillment. This is also revealed in the conscience, which reveals directly the moral and ethical dimensions. After all, a person fulfills himself by true good, not by non-true good, which turns out to be evil. Thus, the issue of good and evil is reduced by Wojtyła to the truth, which he calls the “truth about good”, it is rooted in the nature of man (natural law), and the place of experiencing it is conscience. After all, it defines the true good in acts and shapes an adequate duty to it: “Duty is an experimental form of dependence on the truth to which the freedom of the person is subject” (Wojtyła 1994a, p. 199). Conscience, therefore, not only recognizes the truth about the good, but is also to “make the act dependent on the known truth” (Cf. Wojtyła 1994a, p. 200). In this way, human freedom (self-determination) appears in an integral relationship with the truth about the good („good in truth”). In this way, a normative reality is formed in a person, extremely important for his fulfillment as a person, and especially its dimension that determines becoming a good or a bad person. The connection of freedom with truth is often perceived as a restriction of freedom, as it introduces into it – normative dimensions very reluctantly treated by people of the age of late modernity (also known as postmodernity). These, in turn, are perceived as an element of enslavement, taking the form of the “tyranny of truth”, the truth leading to violence in social dimensions, and finally to totalitarianism, as the influential modern American thinker Richard Rorty seemed to suggest. He proposed to replace the truth with irony. In turn, the Italian postmodernist, Gianni Vattimo, to weaken the allegedly socially destructive action of truth, proposed “weak truths” and “weak beliefs” which, because of their hesitation, do not want to “convert” or even “convince” anyone.

Wojtyła argued with this type of dangerous views in his concept of freedom as self-determination, indicating that truth is the only environment for freedom in which it can function properly. Truth and freedom are the organic unity of the life *ethos* in which man can be himself, can exist authentically, develop his humanity and achieve happiness. After all, man becomes himself only through the truth. It is therefore a mistake to tear this connection between freedom and truth, or to contrast them, which leads to life not in freedom but in its illusion. The Pope repeatedly pointed out that “freedom and truth come together in man, because man is a free being and directed to the truth” (Galarowicz 2005, p. 191). Let us note that such an idea of thinking about freedom and truth is contained in the verse from the gospel of Saint John: “You will know the truth and the truth will set you free” (J 8:32).

Self-fulfillment in an act is closely related to happiness, which was already evident in Aristotle’s thought, in *Nicomachean Ethics*. Wojtyła noted: “The field of happiness should be sought in what is internal and intransitive in an act – which is identified with the fulfillment of self as a person” (Wojtyła 1994a, p. 217). Truth and freedom, interrelated with each other, are the foundation of happiness understood in this way. Only the fusion of freedom with truth creates an environment in which man can fulfill himself as a human person and thus become happy (eudaimonism). Freedom itself does not give happiness, being only a condition for achieving happiness. Only freedom fulfilling itself through truth leads to happiness. Already in the word “self-determination” is included a moment of some self-creation, deciding about oneself: “man is not only the perpetrator of his acts, but through these acts he is also in some way “the creator of himself” (Wojtyła 1994b, p. 428). The choice of a specific value also determines the man himself, who becomes a good or bad man through this choice. . “Man decides not only about his actions, but also about himself in the aspect of the most important quality. In this way, self-determination is becoming a man as a man” (Wojtyła 1994b, p. 428). All this justifies the central position of the structure of self-determination in the ontology of the human person, the position which he attributed to Wojtyła’s self-determination. It is thanks to it and through it that man can multiply good in the world and at the same time become good himself. One cannot point a more sensitive moment in the ontology of the human person.

Karol Wojtyła as a thinker and pastor related to papal teaching of John Paul II

Wojtyła actually from the very beginning of his activities subordinated philosophical thought to pastoral responsibilities, making a creative interac-

tion between his scientific activity and priesthood service. Being with people he provided himself with data for thinking about man. Creating the foundations of his philosophical anthropology, he used the analyzes carried out to be more truthful with another man. From this link, perhaps, his best known book, *Love and Responsibility* (1960), was an attempt at phenomenological and metaphysical reflection on the phenomenon of human erotic love and its ethical foundations. An attempt to understand man and his most important matters through philosophical analysis fulfilled an auxiliary function towards the pastoral efforts of a Krakow priest, later a bishop and cardinal. Inevitably, his creative effort in the field of human philosophy and ethics had an impact on his papal teaching after 1978. This also applies, or rather in a special way, to his philosophy of freedom³. On the one hand, we have the activities of the Polish Pope for the freedom of communities and nations, his activity on the international forum, and on the other, his teaching about freedom.

The social encyclical *Centessimus annus* (1991), making a comprehensive description of the alienation of man and nations, made extensive use of the anthropological considerations of Wojtyła-philosopher, also referring to threats of freedom. They are various types of enslavement, both external and internal. On the one hand, they come from the broadly understood society, social groups (parties, majorities or minorities), and on the other, they come from the heart of man. The phenomena of participation analyzed in the *Person and Act*, his denials in the form of individualism and totalism, authentic (solidarity, dialogue, opposition) and inauthentic forms of participation in the community, such as conformity or avoidance, have found their vast place in the encyclical (Cf. Wojtyła 1994a, p. 301-335). Wojtyła was fully aware of the consequences for man of a false understanding of freedom, hence he was very allergic to this issue. People of the modern era of late modernity often understand their freedom as freedom from any obligations, conditions and even interpersonal relationships. Freedom then develops into the power that creates all the goods, values, senses in which man functions. Self-determination becomes its negation, or willfulness, functioning in an axiomatic vacuum and realizing only my "I want it". Freedom becomes only freedom "from" (negative dimension), and ceases to be freedom "to" (positive dimension) to use the terminology developed by Erich Fromm. And yet "freedom is for love", as the Pope wrote (Jan Paweł II 2005, p. 48). Experiencing and understanding one's freedom is closely related to self-creation, becoming somehow shaped man, which indicates the importance of the truth about freedom. "You pay for your freedom with your entire being", wrote Wojtyła-the poet in *Myśląc ojczyzna* (Wojtyła

³ This is noticed by Andrzej Szostek: "It should also be remembered that already as John Paul II he continued to develop the vision of freedom outlined in the *Person and Act*" (Szostek 2013, p. 47).

1979, 88). Threads related to freedom and its integral connection with the truth and values fundamental to human life, revealed in the *Dekalog*, were constantly present during the Pope's homilies and speeches during his pilgrimage to Poland in 1991, i.e. shortly after the communist yoke was dropped, into which suppression of freedom was immanent. At that time, papal teaching about freedom turned by its nature into truth already aroused a lot of controversy and considerable opposition, which was seen in opinion-forming media. Poles' problems with freedom were just beginning, and this gift often appeared to be "unfortunate" to use the formulation of Józef Tischner. Have we overcome these problems today, and if so, how do we experience freedom in Poland *anno Domini* 2019? What concept of freedom, at the *praksis* level, has won? The questions are very fundamental, probably unwillingly taken up today.

John Paul II repeatedly called for the creation of a "true culture of freedom" (clearly contrasting it with the "cult of freedom"), linking it with truth as its natural *ethos*, a space for proper functioning. This is probably the most visible in the encyclical *Veritatis splendor* (1993), which caused strong controversy. In chapter two entitled *Conscience and truth*, we find many – though only *implicite* present – findings of the work *Person and Act*. It was this connection between freedom and truth that became the main reason for criticism that had already appeared before the encyclical was announced. Anyway, it is worth noting that John Paul II introduced some corrections into his monograph *Person and Act*. One could, therefore, speak of feedback relations between strictly philosophical work and papal teaching. Examples of this are many. The topic is an exciting challenge for detailed analytical work and monographic elaboration.

To sum it up

The concept of freedom developed by Karol Wojtyła is an interesting and original proposition within the contemporary philosophy of freedom. Andrzej Szostek rightly observes that it is "an original and noteworthy contribution to the achievements of modern philosophy and that his approach to freedom helps understand the crux of the modern crisis of civilization" (Szostek 1997, p. 437-438). Jan Galarowicz reasonably pointed out its timeliness and polemical character: "The original Wojtyła's philosophy of freedom, showing the ontological and subjective rooting of freedom, its relationship with truth and dignity, its service character towards vocation, duty, responsibility and love, constitutes an insightful polemic with the understanding of freedom in modern *praxis*" (Galarowicz 2009, p. 165). Wojtyła was not interested in freedom *in abstracto*, but in the freedom of a particular man, the actual way of his exis-

tence, fulfilling himself as a person (his *entelechy*, using the language of traditional philosophy). The concept discussed here belongs to the ontology of freedom. Man, by virtue of his personal structure, has the foundation of freedom as a gift. A gift always has two aspects: it is a gift and also a task. "Freedom can not only be possessed, but it must be constantly gained and created. It can be used in a good or bad way for the service of the real or seeming good. Freedom can not only be possessed, but it must be constantly gained and created", said John Paul II during an audience for believers in Belarus in 1998. It was almost a literal repetition of the phrases from his poem entitled *Myśląc Ojczyzna* (Wojtyła 1979, p. 88). In turn, this poet's statement grew out of the philosopher's thoughts, and *Person and Act* are the theoretical background of the quoted phrases. Development, strengthening and care for freedom is one of the fundamental tasks of man, given the position of this value in the structure of the human person. The concept of freedom related to the truth about the good opened ontological analyzes of *Person and Act* to strictly ethical dimensions. Wojtyła planned to write the second part of his work (together with Tadeusz Styczeń), as evidenced by the book published many years after being elected pope, edited by Andrzej Szostek and entitled *Man in the Field of Responsibility* (Rome-Lublin 1991).

The concept of freedom, developed within Karol Wojtyła's philosophical thinking, has gained a strong impact on socio-political reality, thanks to the activity of John Paul II on the international stage, as well as on the teaching of the Church. This is a unique situation in the philosophy of freedom, and this aspect – apart from theoretical originality – should not be forgotten either.

FILOZOFIA WOLNOŚCI KAROLA WOJTYŁY

Streszczenie

Wolność to wyzwanie dla ludzkiej egzystencji, ale i dla refleksji nad bytem człowieka. Filozofowie, szczególnie w czasach nowożytnych zbudowali kilka fundamentalnych koncepcji wolności. Karol Wojtyła zaproponował oryginalne jej ujęcie poprzez otwarcie klasycznej teorii wolności na nurty współczesne, szczególnie na fenomenologię akcentująca rolę doświadczenia. Poczucie wolności jest dane w przeżyciu "mogę-nie muszę". Samostanowienie jawi się jako wyraz wolności. Wojtyła rozwija ten trop budując zręby własnego myślenia o wolności człowieka. Koncepcja ta zasługuje na wielokształtne odczytania, także w kontekstach wyzwania niesionych przez obecne czasy.

Słowa kluczowe: wolność; filozofia; ontologia; doświadczenie; dar; Karol Wojtyła; Jan Paweł II

Keywords: freedom; philosophy; ontology; experience; gift; Karol Wojtyła; John Paul II

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